A penniless girl

Bertha Behrens



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A PENNILESS GIRL

A NOVEL

OF

W. HEIMBURG

TRANSLATED

BY MRS. A. L. WISTER



PHILADELPHIA

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A PENNILESS GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

UNWELCOME.

BOTH windows were softly opened, and the warm, moist air of spring floated into the room, and played wooingly about a girlish face that lay, strangely pale and quiet, upon the white pillows of the bed. The breeze stirred the fair curls upon the brow, and rustled among the muslin curtains of a cradle which had been thrust into the farthest corner of the room, as if to be out of the way.

"Stand up, Hegebach," said a woman's deep voice. "God gave, and He has taken away; we must bear it patiently."

The speaker was tall and full in figure, apparently between forty and fifty years old, and she spoke to a man kneeling beside the bed, with his arms thrown in agony around the lifeless form that lay upon it. He did not stir, and the speaker hastily brushed the tears from her clear bright eyes.

"Hegebach, this will not do; you cannot stay

there the whole day without food or drink. Come," she continued, her words interrupted by a sob,—"come, Hegebach, you have duties to fulfil; think of the child."

He moaned and arose. No longer young, the lines of suffering in his face, and the evidently military cut of his hair and beard, made him appear much older than he really was, as he gazed with wild despair in his eyes at the sweet, peaceful countenance of the dead. Then, suddenly turning away, he left the room with clanking spurs, not like a mourner, but like an angry, deeply-aggrieved man. She whom he left standing beside the bed silently smoothed down the white folds of the coverlet, passed her hand caressingly over the white, child-like face of her who lay beneath it, and then, going to the corner, picked up the cradle and carried it out of the room.

From an opposite apartment there came a cry. She opened the door and entered a small room with one window,—a very pretty room, although almost too plainly furnished for a lady of condition,—with delicate white curtains and a work-table by the window, through which could be seen the tender green of the linden boughs as they were waved by the spring breeze in the garden outside. The room was unoccupied, save for a white bundle on the sofa, whence protruded a pair of tiny red arms, and from which came the aforesaid cry.

The tall, dignified lady suddenly sank on her knees beside the sofa, and, bursting into tears, hid her face in its small cushion. "Ah, yes," she murmured; "the world has no cheer for you, poor little thing. Motherless, motherless! and your father acts as if God had done him an injury in letting you be a poor little maid. Why are you a silly little lassie, and not a boy? And nothing to give you here; erying and hungry, of course." She looked down thoughtfully at the little red face, all twisted up for a fresh cry. "Hush, hush!" she said, hastily gathering the little thing into her arms; "I'll take you with me to the castle. What should he do with a baby?"

Two days afterwards the young wife of Captain von Hegebach was buried. Her brief span of life was town-talk for a day or two, and those who had known nothing of her previously learned that, although well born, she had been very poor, and that she had married the husband so much her elder for the sake of a home. No one had supposed he would ever marry. He had been an old bachelor, and morose and irritable besides; and just a year ago he had brought this sunbeam to his house,—a short-lived happiness!

"If it really had been happiness," some said. Captain von Selchow assured some of his younger comrades, on the way home from the funeral, that he knew from an infallible source that Hege-

bach's marriage had been a coup de désespoir. He, Hegebach, had received, about a year and a half previously, a letter from his old uncle, the Bennewitzer, as he was called from the name of his large estate, stating that the old man was nowise inclined to leave his property to a couple of old bachelors like his two nephews; he wished to have some idea of him who would eventually inherit it. Therefore he declared that the first of them who should announce to him the birth of a son should be his heir. Daughters could not be taken into Hegebach's cousin, in the Fifth consideration. Dragoons, made no reply to this declaration; there were rumours of some unhappy entanglement in that quarter. "But our captain replied a week afterwards by the announcement of his betrothal. Voilà tout! You know the rest, gentlemen; we have just assisted at the melancholy end of the story. A charming woman,-the little Hegebach. Very sad," he concluded, pathetically.

Frau von Ratenow from the castle had done all that she could for the young mother, and had presided over the arrangements for the funeral: she was a distant relative. The dead woman had been an orphan, but her guardian had been present at the funeral, and her husband's comrades, and the principal government officials of the town, and the regimental band, had preceded the coffin, which was heaped with flowers, through the narrow, winding

streets, and had played "Jesus, on Thee my soul relies." The widower, in full uniform, had followed close behind the hearse. There was no grief visible in his rigid face, but rather an expression of disdain; the lips beneath the gray moustache seemed to curl in a contemptuous smile.

At last it was all over. The people had gone; there was a freshly-heaped mound in the graveyard, and the street before the house of mourning was silent again; one carriage only still stood before the door, an elegant equipage drawn by a couple of fine horses.

In the dead woman's chamber, the small basketcradle in which lay the sleeping infant rocked gently to and fro; an old servant-maid sat beside it, her hands in her lap, her eyes red with weeping. She had covered the simple furniture with coarse linen; the pretty trifles, the flowers in the windows, had all vanished, the carpets and curtains were covered up,—the room looked desolate and forsaken, as if its inmate had departed upon a far, far journey.

Frau von Ratenow entered the captain's gloomy, uncomfortable sitting-room, dressed in her bonnet and shawl. "Good-by, Hegebach," she said. "I must go home now; they have just sent for me. Moritz has come, and matters have been sadly neglected there during the past week. I need not tell you that the little lassie will be well taken care of."

He had been standing at the window looking out into the narrow street; he turned, gazing as if surprised into the strong and still handsome face of the woman before him, and for a moment his lips moved as if he were trying to speak.

"Yes," she went on, "the little thing is in the world, Hegebach, and it needs care and attention; no baby could thrive in this smoky old den of yours. I take it for its mother's sake, although little children are not quite in my line,—Moritz is nearly twenty."

- "I thank you, madame," he muttered; "indeed —I do not know how——"
- "Oh, no need, my dear Hegebach; I only wanted to beg you not to bear the poor little thing a grudge because you cannot fall heir to that sand-hill, Bennewitz. Man proposes, God disposes,—who can tell for what wise purpose?"
- "My cousin's marriage takes place next month, madame."
- "Well, let it," was the reply. "If he has the desired son, the place and the inheritance are his. We all knew that long ago."
- "And the child!" he cried, breaking out for the first time into agonized exclamations. "But for me Lisa would still be living! but for me the child crying in the cradle would have been a son! Who bade me stretch forth my hand to grasp any happiness!"

"Hegebach!" Frau von Ratenow said, reproachfully.

"A penniless girl," he muttered, with intense bitterness; "you know as well as I what that means in our rank of life."

"The meaning is sad enough, that's a fact. But she must win through like other penniless girls,—she must learn to work; she has a pair of stout little arms and a pair of bright eyes. What shall her name be?" she asked, quietly. "Her mother's, Elizabeth——?"

He nodded, and turned again to the window.

"Good-by, Hegebach. Will you not take one look at the little lassie?"

He leaned his forehead against the windowpane, and waved his hand in token of decided refusal.

"Well, I only hope that the child may one day prove a blessing to you, Hegebach,—that you may come to thank heaven upon your knees for the comfort the Lord has provided for your old age. I trust you may come to that."

With the flush of indignation still on her cheek, she went into the other room. "Take the child, Barbara; we are going."

And, followed by the old woman carrying the child carefully wrapped in a blue shawl, she got into the carriage.

They had not far to go,—down the street past

the old Rathhaus, which still showed traces of the Thirty Years' War in the shape of various cannonballs embedded in its walls, through a couple of winding streets and an ancient gateway, then along beside the town wall, above which waved the boughs of fruit-trees in bloom, on through a magnificent avenue of lindens, directly towards a grated gate standing hospitably open, showing the front of a tall, massive structure with a huge, pointed, tiled roof, mossy and gray with age. And, just as the vehicle rolled into the court-yard, above this immense pile of brick, the rugged walls of which were bosomed high in knotty old lindens and alders, their reverend heads wrapped in mantles of tender green, there burst forth a golden ray of sunlight, as if to welcome the new-born child to the house where pity and compassion had provided a home for it.

The carriage drew up before the stately entrance of the mansion, and a young man, very tall and strongly built and still in his travelling-dress, rushed down the broad steps, impatiently tore open the carriage-door, and kissed both hands that were held out to him. "If I had dreamed, mother—," he said; "but I could not possibly present myself in this dress at the funeral. Ah, good heavens! what is that?" he interrupted himself, pointing to the woman holding the infant, as she got out of the carriage.

"Lisa's child, Moritz. God bless the fellow! He'll drop it!"

For the young man, his honest, handsome face aglow, had taken the bundle from the nurse's arms and carried it into the house, followed by the two women.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" he cried, when they had reached the comfortable room, and there was infinite tenderness in his tone as he looked at the tiny face. "How it looks, mother, so little and wrinkled! My poor, dear Lisa!" And he turned away hastily to the window, as if to hide the eyes that had grown moist. "There it is, mother," he went on. "If you had not persuaded Lisa to listen to that gloomy old captain she would be alive now!"

"Moritz, you are a monster!" Frau von Ratenow rejoined, taking the baby from him. "For shame! Why should the girl have waited? The big fellow actually has tears in his eyes! I cannot endure, Moritz, to hear any moaning over 'if' and 'but.' Lisa has fulfilled her destiny as a woman. Peace to her ashes!"

- "And the little one is to stay with us?"
- "Of course, Moritz," his mother replied; "where else should she go?"
- "That is kind of you," he said, putting his arm around his stately mother; "kind as you, and you only, always are."

"No nonsense, Moritz. You know sentiment is not in my line," she said, quietly releasing herself from his arm. "Your father had a turn for it, and you have inherited it. And have you been spending your money again, travelling post to get a glimpse of your mother and your home, you little boy, you?"

She tried hard to look disdainful, but it was of no use; the mother's love would shine brightly in the eyes which she turned upon her only child.

"Just as you say, mother. I had the time, and I knew well that you would not be angry."

"Sure of that," she said, smiling; "how well you know me! But now let us attend to the little one. What do you say, Moritz, to intrusting its bringing up to Aunt Lott?"

"What!" he cried, surprised and amused. "I must help here. Give me the little lady; I'll carry her up. I must be by."

Aunt Lott was Frau von Ratenow's foster-sister and cousin, and a canoness of Z——, but she always lived, except during the prescribed eight weeks which she was obliged to spend at Z—— in order to retain her position, at the castle. She was a quiet creature, not especially intelligent, delicate, pale, and sentimental, the very opposite of Frau von Ratenow, although the two women had grown up together from their earliest childhood. Aunt Lott took an enthusiastic view of everything;

she lived and breathed in an atmosphere of poesy, in higher spheres,—'above the dust of earth.' She read everything she could lay hold of, and the more touching and heart-breaking the story was, the more beautiful she thought it. She knew "The Enchanted Rose" by heart, and when she got to the last verse her emotion reached the highest pitch:

"And naught remains of all that time of gladness
Save this poor song, my sorrow, and love's madness."

These words were sighed forth, not spoken.

Yes, fate had shown her a fair prize in life's lottery, but she had drawn a blank; she had 'a grave' in her heart, as she was wont to declare.

Nevertheless, the two women got along very well together. When the Herr Baron von Ratenow wooed and won the practical cousin, Lott stayed with the lonely parents until they passed away, and then she found a home in a couple of pleasant rooms in an upper story of the spacious castle, where everything about her was of so old-maidish a neatness that one was absolutely afraid to take a step upon the polished floor.

A purring cat sat in the window-seat behind snow-white curtains; the brass doors of the porcelain stove shone like burnished gold; a spinningwheel stood in the corner by the sofa, decked with gay ribbons; and the cabinet was crowded behind its glass doors with all sorts of old-time relics, prom-

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inent among which was a mandarin of Meissen porcelain, who could go on wagging his head for an hour. His value was priceless, Aunt Lott, who greatly admired him, was wont to declare. She was sitting upright in her chair by the window, reading a psalm; she wore a black dress and a black silk apron, for she had dearly loved the captain's young wife.

In that same pretty room, little more than a year before, the weeping girl had placed her hand, with many a misgiving, in that of her elderly suitor, whose acquaintance she had made while on a visit at the castle, as the old Ratenow mansion was called. They played whist together, and he was cross if she made a mistake. A week afterwards his sabre had rattled on the castle staircase, as he came en grande tenue to woo her. For two hours he had waited anxiously and impatiently below in the state drawing-room, until Frau von Ratenow said, "Wait a moment, Hegebach; I will bring the little girl to reason." And then she had gone up to Aunt Lott's room, where 'the little girl' sat trembling, her eyes swollen with crying, while Aunt Lott, armed with cologne and valerian, took the field in vain against nerves which had been excited beyond control by a proposal which had suddenly shocked them like thunder from a clear sky.

An hour afterwards she was betrothed. In the mean time the sonorous tones of the mistress of the

castle had almost reached its lower story; at least Moritz, who was at home upon a visit, declared that he had distinctly heard such telling words as 'Admirable match!' 'What claim?' 'Why wait any longer?' Into this room where the mother had struggled and agonized Moritz von Ratenow now carried her little daughter, and laid her, without a word, in Aunt Lott's lap.

"There, Aunt Lott, is something for you, which will make puss jealous."

"Great heavens above!" she almost screamed, and her eyes wandered from the child, through the trim, neat room, to the pale, grave face of Frau von Ratenow.

"You have time enough, Lott; take the child and take care of it. I brought its nurse, old Barbara, with me. You will not have much trouble. It could not stay with him, since it does not yet smoke cigars, and you know I cannot give it due attention with all my household cares."

While she spoke, the old maid's delicate hands had clasped about the tiny bundle. She did not speak: she could not; but she nodded her head so decidedly, and she wiped her streaming eyes so energetically, that her reply was clear enough. Then Moritz, at his mother's request, pushed aside a tall cabinet that stood against the wall, and a door was disclosed, which, when opened, was found to lead into a pleasant little room hung with blue,

which, hitherto a guest-chamber, was now promoted to be a nursery. Moritz brought up the cradle, and when the twilight came on, Aunt Lott, with her knitting, sat on a low chair, by the light of the night-lamp, beside the little bed, rocking it gently, while on a footstool beside her sat the young Herr Baron von Ratenow, listening eagerly to her whispered account of the baby's dead mother,—so eagerly that neither was aware of Frau von Ratenow's earnest face, as she looked in through the door at the strange pair. The gray cat had sprung upon the foot of the cradle, and sat there licking its paws.

"A queer fellow," the mother murmured, as she went down the stairs; "a man with the heart of a child. His father over again, of course; he does not get it from me." And she took the bunch of keys from her belt with such decision that its jingle hurried off to her work the maid in the kitchen, who was just telling of the small addition to the household; for madame was not to be trifled with.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND SON.

Thus the child grew up beneath the shade of the lindens, in the old house built out of the ruins and upon the ruins of a castle which the Swedes had burned down in the Thirty Years' War. A huge round tower was still standing in the garden; the moat and castle wall still surrounded the sturdy pile, both blue with violets every spring. There was still a draw-well in the garden, a donjon-keep, and eerie ghost-stories in plenty. It had all been for many years the property of the Von Ratenows, to whom it had fallen by marriage,—a Ratenow had wooed and won a Bingsdorf, the last of her race.

When the child's bright eyes gazed from the window they looked beyond the spacious court-yard, with its barns and stables, to the oddly-shaped roofs and towers of the little town; there, close by the Rathhaus tower, beneath the high, gabled roof, dwelt a lonely man, and if the baby, scarcely two years old, was asked, "Who lives over there?" she would point a tiny finger and reply, with sparkling eyes, "Papa!"

Yes, papa; the father who scarcely knew his

child, who only now and then made a short dutyvisit at the castle, where he looked at the pretty little thing as gloomily as if she were some token of misfortune. Nevertheless, the child exulted in his coming, and would hold out longing hands to clutch the bright buttons of his uniform. There must have been something in the little heart that impelled it involuntarily towards the silent, gloomy man.

She was a strikingly beautiful child, the darling of the entire household, and closely wedded to Aunt Lott, to the gray puss, and to tall Moritz. With Aunt Ratenow alone the little girl was shy and timid; the blooming little face would grow pale as ashes at a reproachful look from those clear eyes. She would run as quickly to pick up any small article dropped by the castle's mistress, but not with the smiling alacrity with which she rendered such small services to Aunt Lott, although in each case the thanks were equally kindly.

"She must soon go to school," said Frau von Ratenow one afternoon, as, sitting by the window, she watched the child flying with streaming curls across the court-yard to disappear in the cow-stable, where she usually took her evening draught of milk; "she will be five years old in April." And she pushed up the spectacles, which she had now worn for two years, upon her smooth white forehead, that she might see better.

"To school?" asked Moritz, who was at home for the Easter holidays, and who was pacing the room to and fro, a burly, young, fair-haired giant in a gray summer suit, a saucy moustache shading his upper lip, and with cheeks as fresh in colour as ever.

"To school?" he asked, pausing before his mother. Frau von Ratenow looked up at him surprised.

"Of course, I know, mother dear, that she must learn to read and write, but why not here at home? There are surely governesses enough."

The work was dropped in his mother's lap, and her bright eyes grew even more surprised. "Moritz, I do not know what you are thinking of. If I had daughters of my own, I might perhaps—I say 'perhaps'—adopt for them this expensive, secluded mode of education, but it would be the spoiling of that child; and she is spoiled enough already, more's the pity."

"And is the poor little thing to trot to school upon those little feet in all kinds of weather? At least let her drive there in winter, mother."

"I should be a fool to do so, Moritz," she replied, composedly. "But if you will guarantee her a carriage in her future life, I am agreed. In April Elsie is to go to school. 'Tis not far,—down the avenue,—through the stone archway to Rosen Street,—and there she is."

"Just as you say, mother."

"Right, my boy. And now let us talk of your plans: so when you come back in the autumn from your excursion to Vienna and the Tyrol,—we are to reign here together?"

He laughed, and kissed the hand which she held out to him.

"I trust you're not thinking of marrying yet?" she said, suddenly, with a searching glance at him.

"But, mother," he replied, coming closer to her, "I frankly own, I—have thought of it."

"You precocious boy! Here's a pretty to-do! And who is your choice, my son?"

"An old flame, mother dear. But you need not be alarmed,—she is still at boarding-school."

"Indeed! Still at boarding-school! And what is she learning there, Moritz? Learning to be pale and wan,—a nervous doll, unfit for the duties of wife and mother. And have you reflected upon what she is forgetting? All taste for a quiet homelife will fly out of the window. You should not have let her go there, Moritz, if you wanted her to turn out well."

Moritz looked really confounded for a moment. That his mother should take the matter thus both amazed and delighted him. He walked to and fro in the room a couple of times, his hands clasped behind him, Frau von Ratenow knitting quietly at her stocking the while, and now and then casting a glance out into the court-yard. Thus she

usually sat knitting between four and six in the afternoon; at other times she allowed herself but little rest.

"Hegebach is going to retire, Moritz; did you know it?" she asked, after a while.

"It is the best thing he can do. He will never be promoted," her son replied; "he quarrels with all his superior officers."

"But the pension is so small."

"He can contrive to live upon it, mother."

"He! he! But the girl?" The tone was somewhat impatient.

"Ah, mother!"

"Yes, Moritz. Good heavens! you are talking of marrying! Suppose you should have half a dozen children, what can I do?" She spoke jestingly, and both laughed.

"You dear mother!" he said, still laughing, as he kissed her on the lips.

"No, I'm not joking," she insisted, turning away from him. "I shall take care of Elsie. You need not be afraid that I shall leave that matter half done. She must be well taught. I think she must be a governess, and I shall send her to D—— so soon as she is ten years old. Will not that be best, Moritz?"

At this moment the door opened softly, and a small head peeped in, with hair like gleaming gold and a pair of large brown, childish eyes in a rosy, laughing face, while a voice clear as the note of a lark called, "Moritz! Moritz! do come into the garden. There is a squirrel up in the old chestnut."

"Come here, Elsie," the young man called; and when the child ran to him, he picked her up like a doll and carried her to his mother. "Look at her, mother," he said, with infinite tenderness in his tone.

She looked into the pure childish face and then inquiringly at her son.

"There, run away, Elsie. I'll come in a moment." And the fair-haired young giant opened the door and carefully put the little creature outside.

"Is she not," he said, returning to his mother, "as fresh and lovely as a rose-bud? And you would coop her up in a gloomy school-room in the fairest time of her childhood to pine away with hard mental labour! Why, mother, I cannot endure the thought. What a world of bitter tears and wakeful nights, of buried hopes and constant deprivation, lies in the phrase 'She must be a governess'! Ah, mother, let her be; do not coop her up, poor little lassie!"

"How can you plead so, Moritz? It is absolutely nonsensical!" Frau von Ratenow said, changing colour, and with some impatience. "As if I had any idea of doing the child a wrong! Give her an income if you can. Don't you know that she has nothing in the world except three hundred thalers

and a few clothes from her mother? Hegebach will leave nothing but debts when he dies, and what then? Besides, matters are not gone so far yet, Moritz; you need not pity your rose-bud before-hand. Since you are in love, old fellow, I will forgive you the comparison. Hey? She, too, is certainly a rose-bud." And as she spoke she laid away her knitting in its basket and left the room, and immediately afterwards her son heard her clear, ringing tones below-stairs, "I will show you how to do it. Where there is a will there is a way."

Late that evening Moritz von Ratenow knocked at the door of his mother's bedroom.

"I heard you ride into the court-yard," came from within. "Come in. Where have you been?"

He crossed the threshold and softly approached the canopied bed. The full moon shone through the arched window and plainly revealed the dear old room. How long it seemed since he had been here! There hung his father's portrait above the chest of drawers, and beneath it his own likeness as a boy. There stood the old cabinet in which his mother kept all her relics,—her bridal wreath and his first baby cap, his father's spurs and riding-whip, and the last bunch of wild flowers he had plucked for her before he died. And everywhere the same delicate fragrance of lavender. Suddenly he seemed to be a little boy again, coming to his mother to confess some folly.

"What is it? what do you want, my boy?" she asked, gently, in her Bremen dialect. "Where have you been?"

He seated himself upon the edge of the bed and took her hands. "Guess," he said, hesitating. "But no, you cannot guess. I have been at Teesfeld, at—my father-in-law's."

- "Oh, you terrible fellow!" cried Frau von Ratenow.
- "It was all because of the boarding-school, mother. I told Herr von Teesfeld I loved Frieda, and she loved me, and, if he had no objection to make, that we should marry, and——"
- "And he had no objection? Of course not!" she exclaimed, with a slight access of pride in her voice.
- "Heaven forbid, mother! Well,—in a word, Frieda is coming home from boarding-school."
 - "How old is she, Moritz?"
- "Sixteen and a half. Frau von Teesfeld said we must wait four years."
 - "Very prudent and proper, Moritz."
 - "Are you content, mother?" he asked, softly.

still, it seems to me," she went on, "that your father once said to me, 'Frieda is as feather-headed as her mother.' Yes, I remember it distinctly. Well, well, if it be so you must keep a tight rein from the beginning; you will have to do a deal of training."

He laughed. "She is sweet, mother, just because she is such a sprite."

"'Tis no laughing-matter, Moritz. But now go to bed. To-morrow I will drive to Teesfeld. Your mother must do your pleasure, eh?" And she passed her hand caressingly over his thick fair hair. "Go to bed and to sleep. Don't gaze up any longer at the moon. Do you hear, Moritz?"

When he left her, she sat for a long while upright in bed with folded hands. "I like to have him so decided," she said at last, half aloud, to herself. "When his father courted me he consulted the entire family; the very sparrows sang it on the roofs. The boy knows his own mind,—that he gets from me."

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The door of the old frame house, the windows of which looked out wearily upon the dull monotony of the narrow street, was gently unlatched, and, opening, admitted the slender figure of a girl of about ten. She wore a simple brown stuff dress and a brown straw hat with brown ribbons, from beneath which fell a heavy braid of fair hair. In her hand she carried, very carefully, a little basket of pears and grapes, and, in spite of her stout leather boots, she mounted the steep staircase quickly and noiselessly, and then knocked at a door on the landing.

"Come in!" called a man's voice, and the next moment Elsie von Hegebach confronted her father in the small room, which was, as usual, filled with tobacco-smoke.

The man had grown very old, and looked very shabby in the ragged dressing-gown which he had been wont to wear in his own room since his retirement from the service. He had become sallow, and his habitual expression was one of sour discon-

tent. Nevertheless, the rosy, childish face nestled confidingly against his own.

"How are you, papa?" she asked, putting her basket hastily upon the table and clasping her arms about his neck.

"Small need to ask," was the peevish reply.

A shade passed over the child's laughing face. "Papa, may I stay with you a little while?" she asked, timidly, "or are you going to the club?"

"I am going to the club, as you know; but Barbara is in there."

"Dear papa—" the corners of the rosy little mouth twitched, but the tears were bravely swallowed. "I will go very soon, but, you know, I must bid you 'good-by' to-day,—to-morrow I am going to D—..."

"To-morrow?" he asked, looking up from his newspaper. "At what time?"

"Frau Cramm says I must be at her house at seven in the morning. Aunt Ratenow asked Frau Cramm to take me with her. Annie is going to D—— too, and since Moritz is being married today, and they are all at Teesfeld, and there is no one to go with me——"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted her, impatiently; "it is a very good arrangement. The term begins then, the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, papa. Shall I read the newspaper to you, papa?"

"No, thank you. I wish you a successful journey, Elsie. Remember to be diligent." He held out his hand to her, but looked away from her at his newspaper.

The child stood motionless, her pale lips moved, but she uttered no word, only the eager affection in her eyes gradually faded to an expression of apathy. She turned away to leave the room.

"Elsie!" the call came from behind her. "Take that out to Barbara. I never eat such things." And he pointed to the little basket.

She suddenly threw herself on her knees before him, cross and unkind as he was. "Papa! papa!" she cried, "why will you not love me a little? Why do you never speak kindly to me as Annie's father speaks to her?" The little frame trembled in passionate agitation; she pressed her fair head against his knee, and burst into a convulsive fit of sobbing.

"Good God, child, stand up!" said old Barbara, who had appeared at the sound of the child's ringing cry, and who now raised her from the ground, with a sternly reproachful glance at the major. He arose and paced the room to and fro in a state of nervous agitation.

"Who has been grieving you?" he asked, half anxiously, half angrily. "Has any one been scolding you? What is the matter? Tell me. If you are ill, Barbara shall go with you and put you to bed."

"I am not ill," was the low reply. "Good-by, papa. And hurriedly wiping her eyes, she left the room, and entered the one which had been her mother's, and which Barbara had occupied since she had kept house for the major. The child seated herself silently by the window, and looked out into the neglected garden. How sad she had felt for the last two weeks, since Aunt Ratenow had one day sent for her in her room, and had told her—what had she said to her?

"Elsie," she began, stroking the little girl's fair hair as she spoke, "you are now ten years old, and a sensible child; it is time to talk seriously to you about several things. Every one, my child, must, in order to be happy, be of some use in the world, and surely you would wish to be so. Some people are born, as it were, with a silver spoon in their mouths, and never need ask, all their lives, 'What shall we cat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?' Others have nothing else to do while they live except to ask themselves these very questions; and they need not think themselves so badly off, since the Bible says, 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.'

"Your father, Elsie, is lonely and ill; he has had severe trials in life, and he is a poor man; he cannot give you a silver spoon, but instead the good God has given you a bright mind and a fresh,

healthy body, and you can easily answer the questions of which I told you if you honestly wish to do so. I want you to lay to heart, Elsie, that you must be in earnest and industrious that you may pass your governess examinations successfully, for this is the only way in which a young girl of your rank can maintain herself independently in the world."

To the child it seemed as though a dark veil had suddenly dimmed all the glory of life. She saw around her the gray school-room with its stifling atmosphere, the dark walls ready to enclose her, the windows rarely visited by a sunbeam, and there she must stay, chained to the spot,—she who so loved the air, the flowers, and the sunshine,—chained there, not until she was grown up, but forever, forever. Oh, it was impossible!

"Well, Elsie, do you not like it?"

She not only shook her head, her entire body quivered with repugnance and dread.

"Then you will be a little blockhead, and will grow up like Barbara. Knowing nothing, you will be treated accordingly."

"But why I?" she had exclaimed. "The other girls need not do so." And the brown, fawn-like eyes had gazed eagerly into the grave face confronting hers, as if pleading for the solution of some inexplicable enigma.

"Many of them must, Elsie, and you are one of

these. It is my duty to train you to be independent. Now go; you must obey, my child, although you cannot now understand why."

And then she had gone to Aunt Lott, pale and panting. "I must go away, aunt." Not another word could she say; her eyes wandered about the dear, pleasant room, and rested upon the kind old face; and as she looked she saw two large tears roll slowly down over all the delicate wrinkles and fall upon the white cap-strings, but she herself was too wretched to cry.

She must go away for so long, so long, away from her childhood's home, from the shady garden, from Moritz, from every one! And yesterday Aunt Lott, with many tears, had packed her trunk for her, and she had taken leave of her and of Aunt Ratenow, and of dear, dear Moritz, for last evening they had all gone to Teesfeld for the marriage. Aunt Lott had taken her gray satin gown out of her wardrobe, and had even mounted her Pegasus to celebrate the solemn occasion. Elsie knew the verses by heart,-they forcibly reminded one of 'The Enchanted Rose,' and there were frequent allusions in them to Amor, to rosy chains, and to love's sweet magic. Oh, how delightful it must be to go to a wedding! How she would like to have gone! but Aunt Ratenow would not allow it. "What would you do there, Elsie?" she said. "Children are only in the way."

Now she had been alone all day long; even puss had gone to walk upon the roofs. What good did it do her to have the housekeeper bring her a glass of wine and a piece of cake for dessert? "From the master, Elsie; he bade me not to forget it," she said, as she put the waiter on the table. For the first time in her life the child felt the pangs of loneliness, the deep, ardent desire for some human being who belonged to her and upon whom she had an undeniable claim. And so she ran to her father.

Suddenly she arose; she could not stay another instant in the dreary, shabby room. It smelled of bad coffee, there were grease-spots on the floor, the old woman's gowns were hanging on the wall, the plain mahogany furniture was scratched, and the covering of the sofa defaced by moths and rough usage. She ran like some hunted creature down the stairs, hurried along a narrow street, and soon stood breathless within the church-yard beside the ivy-covered grave of the mother whom she had never known.

The September day was declining; dim clouds were gathering in the west, and the evening air cooled the child's burning cheeks. "My mamma," she said, half aloud; there was infinite pathos in the two words, and she knelt and leaned her head against the simple iron cross. And there she stayed until the sexton's wife, passing by chance, called to

her kindly and bade her go now, for the church-yard was about to be closed.

She hurriedly plucked a few ivy-leaves before she left the grave. Then she stood until far into the night at Aunt Lott's window, listening to the shouts and songs of the servant-men and maids, who were celebrating their young master's marriage in the servants' hall around a bowl of smoking punch.

CHAPTER IV.

A TENDER PARENT.

The sun that struggled through the clouds at eight o'clock the next morning looked down upon a pale, childish face gazing with questioning eyes from the window of a carriage that was rolling quickly along the highway. On the opposite seat sat a stout, blooming matron and a corpulent little man, and wedged between them was their snubnosed little daughter, whom they were taking for a couple of years' instruction in the famous D——Institute. Each parent held one of her little hands, and the mother's eyes still showed traces of tears. Elsie sat alone on the back seat with the hand-bags and wraps, her childish soul filled with gloomy pictures of the distant unknown life upon which her little feet were just entering.

And now let eight years pass; they are gone, and again we look in upon the little Margraviate town.

Major von Hegebach still sat smoking and reading in his comfortless room, old Barbara was still boiling her detestable coffee; but the major did not go as regularly to the club as of yore,—walking

gave him pain: he limped; the wretched gout had deprived him of the only entertainment left him, and his temper was by no means improved.

Old Barbara had a harder time of it than ever, but she was not aware of it; her apprehension was dulled, and scarcely anything in the world, save her coffee-pot, possessed any interest for her, with the exception, perhaps, of Elsie.

Every four weeks regularly a letter had been laid upon the old man's desk, and the handwriting upon the envelope had gradually changed from the clumsy characters traced by a child to the clear, bold hand of a woman. He had answered her but once,—when Elsie was confirmed,—and his letter was carefully put away in a box containing a simple garnet necklace, the only ornament her dead mother had possessed. The girl's reply had contained a childlike promise always to be an obedient daughter to her dear father, and now to-day another short letter lay before him:

"My DEAR AND HONOURED FATHER,—You shall be the first to learn that I have passed my examination No. 1! The principal has just sent for me to tell me this. I am so pleased and happy; all my hard work is forgotten. I shall come to you in a few days, dear papa, and ah, how the seeing you will rejoice the heart of your affectionate daughter, "Else."

He had read the letter again and again, and his face had grown graver as he read. And while he sat and pondered, up at the castle two withered old hands were busy arranging the room for a darling child's return home. Aunt Lott and Aunt Ratenow had received the same joyful intelligence by the next post, and the former had gone to work immediately to set to rights the old nursery,—of course the child would occupy it again.

Below in the sitting-room of old Frau von Ratenow nothing was changed, except that she herself had grown stouter, and there were, perhaps, more distinct signs in her face of an inflexible will and of prompt and active energy. And yet there was something new here, something that added a homelike charm to the comfortable room with its soft rugs, its heavy blue curtains, and its glittering brass sconces. Near the hearth, upon which an autumnal fire was burning, three children were playing, a boy and two girls,-two fair, blue-eyed girls, with rosy cheeks, and unmistakably like their father, and a dark-eyed, dark-haired rogue of a boy, the youngest of the three. There was shouting and laughter enough to have wearied any ears save those of a grandmother. Frau von Ratenow, however, seemed not to hear it; she was reading a letter, which she dropped in her lap and then took up and read a second time. "Lulu!" she called, "run and bring papa here."

The elder girl, a delicate little thing five years old, sprang up and ran out of the room. A few minutes afterwards there glided through the opened portière a small, excessively pretty woman, dressed in rich black silk, who was hailed by the children with loud shouts of "Mamma! mamma!"

"My precious darlings!" she said, kissing them; and then, turning to Frau von Ratenow with eager curiosity, she asked, "What is the matter, mamma? Moritz will be here in a moment."

"Is your name Moritz, little curiosity?" the old Frau said, not unkindly, but evidently not greatly pleased.

But the delicate little lady was nowise daunted; with a laugh she clasped her arms about the old Frau's neck. "Oh, mamma dear, you know I am terribly curious. It is no secret of state, is it? Please, please let me stay."

"When will you be a little sensible, Frieda? Are you always to remain a child? But it is all because Moritz spoils you so terribly."

And indeed she seemed created to be spoiled, this charming little person, graceful in every movement, with a delicate oval face, smooth black hair, the simple arrangement of which displayed to advantage the exquisite shape of the head, and large dark-blue eyes shaded by long black lashes. No wonder that the 'boy,' as his mother still called him, was as much in love as upon the day when he married.

"Oh, of course," he said as he entered, with pretended vexation, while his eyes sparkled; "here she is, determined to hear what is the matter."

"But I have heard nothing yet, Moritz."

"That is certainly most unfortunate, little lady. Be quiet, you imps!" he cried, putting his hands over his ears. "There is no hearing one's self speak here. Go to Caroline."

Meanwhile, the mother handed the letter to her son, saying, "Elsie has passed her examination and is coming home on Tuesday."

"Ah, indeed!" Moritz exclaimed, evidently much pleased. "Thank Heaven! She will be glad enough to turn her back upon the school-room."

"But I should like to know, Moritz, what is to become of her."

His kind, honest eyes opened wide in wonder. "Nothing, for a while, mother dear. Let the poor thing have a rest; she will need it."

Frau von Ratenow nodded. "All right; but you make her return to her father's house all the harder."

"Yes, Moritz, you will only spoil her," his young wife observed.

"Merciful heavens! What would become of the poor child with that old bear?" exclaimed Moritz, compassionately.

"It is her duty to take care of her father, who is growing very old. The man is in positive dis-

tress, Moritz. Old Barbara grows dirtier and more careless every day, and——"

"Yes, yes; you are right, mother," he interrupted her. "But not just yet; we have had no time for consideration. That house must be made habitable first. If I had thought of this it should have been done long ago. As it is, at present I shall not let the girl go to it. She must stay here for the first two weeks; that I insist upon."

"Nothing is gained," said his mother.

"Nothing need be gained at present," he rejoined.

A short pause ensued, during which the click of the knitting-needles was audible.

"Two years ago to-day," the young man began, at last, "that dreadful misfortune happened to the Bennewitzer. What a fearful blow, the loss of two boys at the same time!"

"Horrible!" said his wife. "I cannot see how it could happen."

"Very simply, Frieda. The two boys went sailing alone on the Elbe. A sudden squall must have overturned their boat; the bodies were not recovered until the next day."

"Yes, it was hard," said Frau von Ratenow, involuntarily wiping her brow with her handkerchief.
"Just four years ago his wife died."

Suddenly she dropped her hands in her lap, and seemed to muse; then, with a blush, she said,

- "Could not something for Elsie—? The man is very wealthy, and quite alone in the world."
- "A similar idea occurred to me," said Moritz.

 "But then daughters are debarred by the uncle's will from inheriting, and the Bennewitzer is not so very old; doubtless he will marry again, and——"
- "'The beggar's bread is always falling out of his pocket;' 'tis an old proverb, my boy," his mother interrupted him, her equanimity quite restored. "I must invite him here, Moritz. I found his card on my table lately."
- "Do you know the Bennewitzer Hegebach, mamma?" the young wife asked. "I have never seen much of him, but my sister Lili raves about him," she went on. "All I know of him is that he is a fine-looking man, not in the least like his cousin."

But Frau von Ratenow made no reply.

- "Moritz," she asked, "how are the roads?"
- "Hard and good, mother; the rain did not go deeper than a couple of inches."
- "Excuse me, then; I have an errand to do." She rose, and, with a friendly nod to the pair, went into her adjoining bedroom.
 - "Where are you going, mother?" asked Moritz.
- "Mamma dear, in a quarter of an hour I am going to drive to Frau von Kayser's," the young wife called in at the half-open door. "If you could wait——"

"Thank you, children, I shall walk," came in answer. There was no reply to Moritz.

It was growing dark when Frau von Ratenow returned and went directly up-stairs to Aunt Lott's door, at which she knocked, entering immediately afterwards. The old lady was sitting at the window looking down into the garden; she had laid aside her book and her knitting: it was too dark to see to read or to work.

"It is absolutely incredible, Lott!" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, seating herself, as if out of breath, on the nearest chair.

Aunt Lott was startled: her cousin so seldom threw aside her reserve.

"My dear Ratenow, tell me, in Heaven's name, what has happened?"

"Yes, Lott; you see I come to you, because I cannot talk to Moritz. What has happened? Well, you know Elsie is coming the day after tomorrow. Moritz and I differed with regard to her future. I said she ought to go to her father; he said that would be cruel, that she ought to come here——"

"And Frieda?" Aunt Lott ventured to interrupt.

"Frieda? Frieda has nothing to do with it,"
was the reply, in a depreciating tone. "She says
one thing at one time, and another at another; she
has no judgment; she never had any. If she were
getting up private theatricals and thought Elsie

would fill a certain part well, she would say, 'Ah, mamma dear, don't let her go to her cross old father!' and if there chanced to be thirteen to sit down at table, it would be, 'Yes, mamma dear, she belongs with her father,' just because of the unlucky number."

The old Frau paused for a moment, and then went on, as she threw aside her heavy silk wrap: "In short, I put on my bonnet and went to Hegebach; I hoped he would want the child with him to cheer his old age. But what do you think, Lott!" She raised her voice, and let her hand fall heavily upon the table by which she sat. "He does not want her! Did you ever read in any of your stupid novels of a father's refusing to have his only child live with him? He grew actually angry at last, and trembled in every limb, as he talked about a young girl with her countless claims on existence, and his own desire for but one thing,—rest, rest, rest!"

"But, Ratenow, my dear, you irritate yourself needlessly," Aunt Lott said, soothingly; "he was always like that."

"And how, in Heaven's name, is one to help being irritated? Why, he went on to prove clearly to me that he had no use for such an article of luxury as a grown-up daughter! He had scarcely enough for himself; he was still clearing off his old debts by monthly payments,—who would undertake to pay them if he died? He could do no more for her; he had given towards her education the three hundred thalers which Lisa had brought him. Elsie must make use of her accomplishments now; many were in the same situation; and so on."

"Poor girl! poor girl!" said Aunt Lott, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I gave him a piece of my mind, Lott," the old Frau continued; "and you know my words are not always smothered in honey."

Aunt Lott was mute; she was but too well aware of that fact.

"He was silenced, and at last turned pale; but what of that? I meant well by him; there is no forcing people to be happy——"

"And now, my dear Ratenow?"

"Well, now Moritz will have his way," was the discontented reply.

"Never mind, cousin," Aunt Lott said, her innermost heart rejoicing in her darling's return, "never mind; who knows how it may all turn out? You see——"

"I know perfectly well, Lott," Frau von Ratenow interrupted; "she'll live on for a while with never a thought of anything serious, as has, unfortunately, come to be the fashion with us, and when she is forced to work, when the 'must' comes, as come it will, rely upon it, and that at no distant day, perhaps she will have lost the power to adapt herself to her circumstances."

- "But it is all in God's hand, my dear Ratenow. She may marry."
- "Are you prepared to give her a dowry, Charlotte?" was the contemptuous rejoinder. "Let it be a large one."
 - "Oh, this terrible prose!" sighed Aunt Lott.
- "Your poetry, however, will never bake you a single loaf of bread. There is no ignoring our stomachs, child, and no tender excess of love will prevent one from growing hungry, as the young men of the present day know very well, and still better do they know that caviare tastes better than veal broth."

Aunt Lott uttered no syllable in reply to this bitterly realistic statement, but after a few moments of profound silence she said, timidly, "My dear Ratenow, I have an idea. If you—no, if Moritz—Frieda was saying lately that she must soon have a governess. Now, if Elsie would try to teach the children, she would have a serious occupation, and—"

She paused, and tried to scan the features of her cousin through the deepening twilight.

"That is—perhaps that would do, Lott," Frau von Ratenow said, slowly, as she arose. "It is by no means a bad idea, Lott; indeed, I will speak to Moritz—"

And then the door closed after her, and as the firm tread in the corridor echoed and died away through the quiet little room, Aunt Lott stood at the window shaking her head. The world was growing more and more prosaic.

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CHAPTER V.

AT HOME AGAIN.

A CLOUDY, chilly October day was drawing to a close; the locomotive, with a long train of cars behind it, its huge eye red and glaring, whistled through the thick gray fog, blowing out immense clouds of steam and smoke into the white mist, and smoke and steam were whirled and tossed hither and thither in wild, fantastic shapes, floating in and out among the pines in long array as the train rushed onward at a giddy speed.

At the window of a first-class carriage a young girl was standing. She had grown so tall that the ribbon of her round straw hat was almost on a level with the upper frame of the window. She was the only occupant of the carriage on this damp, cold evening, but there was no consciousness of cold or loneliness in her young face; her cheeks were flushed with joyous excitement, her brown eyes sparkled, the full lips quivered as if with a smile, and then parted for an instant with an expression of expectant happiness that lent the face a wonderfully childlike charm. She went from one window to the other, but there was noth-

ing to be seen but steam; she thought the train was intolerably slow. A dozen times she picked up her leather hand-bag, only to lay it aside again. How surprised they would all be! Moritz did not expect her until ten, and it was only seven o'clock.

Her heart throbbed violently as, after a long whistle from the engine, single lights began to glide past the windows. How long it was since she had been here! For the last four years it had never been possible for her to pass her holidays at the castle. Once they were all travelling, then the children had the measles, and—

Ah, there was the railway station! Elsie put up the window and leaned far out in the cold, damp autumn air. There was the fountain, there stood the old one-eyed porter, and down below, beyond the gardens, the lights of the town gleamed reddishyellow through the fog. Ah, what a joy it is to come home after an absence among strangers!

"Where to, Fräulein?" asked the porter.

"Oh, let it be; they'll send for it from the castle to-morrow," she replied. "I came earlier—"

"Are you going alone, then?" the man asked, vexed at not being able to earn a trifle.

Elsie reflected that Aunt Ratenow thought it unbecoming for ladies to walk alone. "You can carry my satchel for me, but pray be quick." And she hurried on along the familiar street to the city gate, and only then did her panting companion overtake her. There stood the old Rathhaus tower; here they all were, the pointed, irregular houses, and the lanterns swung on their chains in the middle of the streets as of old; the house-bells rang with the well-remembered sound, and the shop where Moritz sometimes bought her bonbons had the same Moorish boy in its window, as a sign that genuine tobacco was sold there.

At last she paused and gazed up at a couple of dimly-lighted windows; involuntarily she turned to hasten up to 'papa.' But Moritz had written to her expressly that he and Aunt Ratenow wished to speak with her first, and she slowly walked away.

"A roundabout way, Fräulein," muttered her companion. "You must be a stranger here."

She nodded, with a smile, and walked on quickly through the stone archway up the linden avenue. She knew every one of the rugged trunks standing out black in the mist; she knew the gleam of yonder lantern, and the barking of the watchdog as it fell upon her ear. With a beating heart she leaned against the arch of the gateway. Before her was the dear old house; those windows up there were Aunt Lott's; they shone brightly, and so did Aunt Ratenow's beneath them; the torch blazed above the door of entrance, figures moved to and fro behind the kitchen windows, and the big carriage was just being dragged out of the coach-house.

"You can go," she whispered to the man, taking

her bag from him and thrusting a piece of money into his hand. Then with winged feet she ran across the court-yard, up the steps to the hall door, and into the vaulted hall.

Whither should she go first? She hesitated but for an instant, and then turned to the staircase. Up there was the shining little room that was still her nearest and dearest home. "Aunt Lott!" she called upon the threshold. It echoed like a lark's song through the old lady's quiet room.

"Elsie! my darling!" was the response. Yes, she was at home again; she was expected here. Ah! it is delicious to come home after absence among strangers.

"Good heavens! I hardly knew you, Elsie; but the eyes are your own," cried Aunt Lott, releasing the girl from her embrace.

"Darling aunt, I have grown, have I not? I am eighteen years old."

"Come, come, take off your wrap; and look, here is tea all ready. Yes, yes, eighteen years old, my child. I told you in your birthday poem what that means to us old folk." And Aunt Lott stood, teapot in hand, before the rosy, laughing girl, and declaimed,—

"Eighteen years! the magic splendour
Of the morn greets thee to-day,
Half-unfolded tender rose-bud,
Kissed by spring-time's sun's bright ray——"

"And oh, aunt, I do so delight in life!" the girl interrupted the old lady. "When I was poring over my books until my head grew so dull that I could get nothing more into it, I used to think of all the delight that every one must have in the youth that lies before me too. Sister Beata used to say that Heaven has allotted a share of happiness to every one. Ah, aunt, I take such pleasure in my share! I could scarcely wait for the time to run away from the school-room."

Aunt Lott poured out tea in a hurry. She suddenly found herself in a dream of spring-time and songs of nightingales; she too had once been young, and here was the embodied spring sitting in her little room. How pretty the girl had grown! How dewy fresh was the young face looking abroad into life! How many blossoms of hope were blooming behind that smooth white brow, bringing light to the eyes and joy to the heart!

"Oh, youth!" whispered the old lady,-

"Eighteen years! the poorest life it blesses with a royal dower;
All the future's gloomy valleys glow with sunshine by its
power."

And there the girl sat. She had worked hard for years; she had no real home, no loving mother, no prospects for the future, and yet youth asserting its right to be happy, to demand happiness, exalted her into a very heaven. And how long would it be before Aunt Ratenow would come with her garden-scissors and, after her wretched realistic fashion, snip off one after another of those blossoms of hope? Aunt Lott had to turn away and set the tea-kettle on the stove that she might conceal her tears.

"And how are you all here, aunt?" said Elsie, hastily swallowing her tea. "I must go down to Aunt Ratenow and Moritz and Frieda."

"Yes, yes, so you must, child," said the old lady. "You will not, indeed, see much of Frieda. There's a rehearsal going on down-stairs,—they are getting up something for Aunt Ratenow's birthday; but Moritz will certainly have a few minutes to spare."

"Rehearsal? Who is rehearsing?"

"Who, child? Why, the officers from town and the young people; and there's always a supper afterwards; and night before last they danced——Good gracious! Elsie, I hear your aunt's step, and you did not go first to her."

"No; that is Moritz," said Elsie, running behind the stove, and gathering her skirts close about her.

Yes, it was Moritz; he only wanted to ask whether Aunt Lott would not drive to the station for the little one. Frieda had half the town again at supper down-stairs. As he spoke, he dropped into the nearest chair and stroked his hair back from his forehead,—a gesture usual with him when he wanted to drive away unpleasant thoughts.

Suddenly two trembling little hands were laid upon his eyes. "Who am I, Moritz?" asked a dear familiar voice, and then came a refreshing burst of musical laughter.

"You witch!" he exclaimed, and held her fast as he sprang up. "Why, my girl, what a fine creature you are grown to be!" His kindly face fairly shone. "You can't have been quite starved in D—, and, thank God, you don't look in the least learned."

"No, Moritz; there's no reason why I should. The Professor said as much to me yesterday, do you know," she rejoined, meekly. "But the examination went really quite brilliantly," she added, consolingly, in answer to his smile.

He was still gazing at her. "Aunt Lott, we are growing old. Think of my holding that tall young lady so!" he dandled an imaginary infant in his arms. "And now?"

"Yes, indeed," said Aunt Lott. "When I saw her stand so before me I thought of Schiller's

'And lovely in her youthful splendour, like--'"

"That's right, Lott," a voice interrupted her. "Fill her head with nonsense at once." And Aunt Ratenow appeared, as if by magic, in the open door-way, with Frieda's laughing face peeping from behind her.

"We want to see if it is true," she cried. "Karo-

line insisted that she heard Elsie's voice up here. Yes, there she is!"

Elsie emerged from the folds of Aunt Ratenow's soft woollen shawl, which she had thrown on to guard against the chill of the long corridors, and then was eagerly embraced, and kissed on the lips by Frieda. "Why, Moritz, she comes just in the nick of time. I have just had a note from Frau von D——; she is obliged to give up her part on account of a death in the family. Now we are all right."

- "What is it?" Frau von Ratenow asked, sharply.
- "I have no time to explain, mamma dear, I must run down again; and, besides, you must not ask me," said Frieda. "Moritz, bring Elsie downstairs with you." And in an instant the pretty little woman, in her rich blue silk attire, had vanished from the room.
- "Well, child," Aunt Ratenow informed the young girl, "we have decided that you remain here for the present."
- "Most gladly, if papa will allow me," was the unsuspecting reply; "but then, aunt—"
- "You may be sure he will allow it," the old Frau interrupted her. It sounded oddly. Aunt Lott and Moritz exchanged glances.
 - "And then you may-" she went on.
- "We'll discuss all that to-morrow," Moritz broke in. "Dearest mother," he entreated her,

"take supper with us this evening; Frieda will be so pleased."

"You know, Moritz, that I cannot bear all the chatter," she replied.

"Good heavens! of course it would be far pleasanter if we were alone; but—do come! Aunt Lott and Elsie, get ready to come to supper. My mother and Aunt Lott may be excused soon after supper is over; special permission is accorded my mother to retire."

Aunt Ratenow shook her head dubiously. "My honest old birthday used to justify all this fiddle-faddle! But come for me, Moritz, when you want me."

"Aunt Lott," began Elsie, as she was finishing her simple toilette, the pink ribbons of which showed to great advantage her clear skin and fair hair, "it all seems odd and strange here. Aunt Ratenow was annoyed, and so was Moritz, and——"

"Yes, but I am sure I can't tell why," was the evasive answer. "Are you ready? It is time to go."

Elsie was ready, and together they walked along the corridor and down the staircase. "Oh, Elsie, my pocket-handkerchief!" Aunt Lott exclaimed, just as they reached the doors of the young Von Ratenow's apartments. She always forgot something.

"Go in, aunt; I will get it for you," the girl rejoined.

A few moments afterwards, as she was descending the staircase, she paused and hesitated. Not far below her on the spacious landing she saw a young officer. He had just given his hat to the servant, and buttoned the coat of his uniform tightly about his waist; and as Elsie looked he stooped and took a violin-case from the floor, and walked towards the door of the hall belonging to Frieda's rooms. At this moment he glanced upwards, and the two young people looked each other full in the eyes.

Then followed what is usual when a gentleman meets a lady; he bowed low, with a slight jingling of spurs, and opened the door, and the girl, with a gracious inclination, preceded him into the hall. It was dimly lighted, but even as she hurriedly passed through it, Elsie could admire the costly hangings and furniture which had lately enriched its spacious and rather gloomy dimensions. had become a genuine model of an antique German state apartment, with its dark wainscoting, its old, richly-carven oak furniture, and the heavy silken stuffs of its hangings which fell to the floor in artistic folds; here and there a pale ray of light from the costly lamps was reflected from some fine bronze, and the palms in the rare vases filled with flowers stirred lightly as she passed with noiseless footfall over the thick rugs.

A flood of light streamed from Frieda's drawing-room, gay with eager talk and laughter. When

the young girl appeared there was an instant's lull; she was presented to the chief of the guests, and advanced into the heavy, odorous atmosphere of the charming room. She took refuge with Aunt Lott, behind whose chair she found a seat, whence she looked out with eyes of childlike wonder upon the gay new world before her.

Such a hum and chatter and laughter and gay exchange of glances! All the trifling news of the day of the little circle was discussed, with now and then an extract from the small chronique scandaleuse of the town, and an occasional trenchant remark from Aunt Ratenow. There was a glitter of uniforms, there were elegant if simple toilettes, and suddenly through the room there ran a whisper, "Bernardi is going to play!"

The officer with whom Elsie had entered took a violin from its case, and had an eager conference with Frieda, who then seated herself at the grand piano, stroked back the delicate lace ruffles from her wrists, and struck a few chords. Instantly a dead silence reigned throughout the apartment.

"It is Bernardi," Aunt Lott whispered in the girl's ear. "Listen with all your ears; he plays enchantingly." And the next instant there trembled and thrilled through the room, beneath the bow drawn across the strings by a strong, slender hand, a tone of marvellous richness and purity. Note followed note, now wailing in tender melancholy,

now breathing eager delight in life, in free, wild rhythm. And then the hand that held the bow dropped, and there was silence again.

Elsie started; she seemed to be awaking from a dream. A burst of applause followed, and that from Aunt Ratenow was loudest of all.

"My dear Bernardi," she cried, "I know nothing of modern music. Your father moved me to tears when he played Beethoven's 'Adelaïda' upon that very violin, but I yield the palm to his son." And she cordially held out her hand to the young man, who bowed low, kissing it respectfully. Then there was a whispered consultation with Frieda, and, with another low bow to the old Frau, he took up his instrument, and the notes of Beethoven's divine song floated through the room.

"'Graven deep on every crimson petal: Adelaïda, Adelaïda,' "Aunt Lott whispered, with sparkling eyes. "Oh, what a pity! so soon over! Dear Lieutenant Bernardi, how wonderful!" Elsie heard her say; and when she looked up he was standing before the old lady; but his eyes looked past the white lace cap, and sought her own; dark, almost melancholy eyes, that lent a strange charm to his regular features and well-formed mouth which was shaded by a black moustache. His comrades maintained that he came of gypsy folk, which was why he could draw such tones from his ancient violin.

"Is Fräulein von Hegebach a musician?" he

asked in the most commonplace way, drawing a chair near to Aunt Lott and Elsie.

"I sing a little," she replied, and then the ice was broken. Aunt Lott threw in a word here and there for propriety's sake; she understood nothing of music, and was inwardly astounded by all that her little Elsie had learned. How glibly she talked of thorough-bass and Chopin and Wagner!

At supper Elsie sat next Bernardi and took no note of time. She saw neither Moritz's smile nor Aunt Ratenow's grave glances. "The girls of today," the old Frau said to herself, "can be taken directly out of their swaddling-clothes and set down at table, and they'll find something to chatter about instantly." Then she rose, and in doing so gave the sign that supper was over. When Elsie kissed her hand and wished her 'Gesegnete Mahlzeit,' she held the young girl's arm in a firm grasp.

"Take me over to my rooms, child," she said. And without waiting to bid good-night to Frieda, who was busy in the next apartment, she took what she called 'French leave;' that is, she left the assembly unnoticed, going through Moritz's study to her own rooms.

"Well, Elsie," she said, when she had arrived there, "that's well over. Mercy on us, how those young women can talk! Your tongue, too, has wagged pretty well. Were you entertained?"

"Oh, aunt!" said Elsie, flushing crimson.

"The only sensible thing was Bernardi's playing," Frau von Ratenow went on, without noticing the blush. "Ring for my maid, Elsie; she must bring me some water, and then you can go. Go to sleep, child; early to-morrow morning we'll have a talk."

"Elsie, where are you?" Frieda's voice called from without.

"Well, well, never mind," the old lady muttered. And as Frieda appeared, she motioned to Elsie to leave her.

"I verily believe," the young Frau declared, "that mamma would have sent you to bed like a little child. Come, quick; you must read your part over now, and afterwards we are going to dance."

It was long past midnight when Elsie went upstairs. She looked over the carved balusters down into the hall where the guests were putting on cloaks and wraps. Bernardi stood in the midst of them and looked up an adieu. "Good-night!" she cried, like a merry child. Then she sat for a long while on Aunt Lott's bed, and they talked of school, and of Sister Beata, and of everything imaginable; even the cat who had died was not forgotten. It was of little consequence what they talked about, for as for sleeping Elsie found that quite impossible.

CHAPTER VI.

A PENNILESS GIRL.

THE next morning the rain poured in torrents; it dripped and ran from the roofs, it gurgled and bubbled in their gutters, and the wellnigh leafless boughs of the trees waved, moaning and creaking, to and fro in the keen autumn blast. The chill, frosty air seemed to have infected the inmates of the castle Aunt Lott and her foster-daughter were the also. only ones among them who arose in a happy frame of mind. "Now, aunt, you are to have a time of rest," said Elsie. And when the old lady entered her little drawing-room she found all her small morning tasks performed; there was not a speck of dust anywhere to be seen, her flowers were all watered, and the starling in his cage had been duly attended to. Elsie was sitting in her neat morning dress at the window, gazing at the dripping world outside.

"I love this kind of weather," she began, as they sat drinking their coffee, "it makes home look so delightful; but still the rain is in my way to-day. I must go to papa, Aunt Lott; my conscience pricks me for enjoying myself so much last evening without having seen him."

She had scarcely finished speaking when there was a knock at the door, and Moritz entered in a shaggy coat and high boots.

"Ah, Moritz, I see by your face you have a headache," Aunt Lott exclaimed.

He nodded and gave her his hand. "It's quite intolerable," he replied. "I come to ask Elsie if she does not wish to go into the town; I have business at the Rathhaus."

Elsie was delighted to go, and went to put on her bonnet. Moritz looked after her. "She has grown up a dear, good child, Aunt Lott, and very pretty," he said, as the door closed behind her.

The old lady nodded a decided assent. "And how are you all below-stairs, Moritz?"

"Well, only so-so. Frieda has had bad news; a brother of her father's is dead. She never knew him, she says, but of course the family must go into mourning, especially since the old man was unmarried and his entire fortune goes to my father-in-law. Frieda is going to town with me to make some purchases."

"Aha!" said Aunt Lott. "And your theatricals?"

"Those, thank Heaven, are at an end," he said, smiling in spite of his headache. "No need for such promptitude, Elsie: Frieda is not nearly ready; but you can come meanwhile and say 'good-morning' to my mother."

Frau von Ratenow was seated at her window, sorting a huge pile of stockings, drawing each one on her hand, and examining it carefully through her spectacles.

"You are a dear, good girl, Elsie," she said, in the course of conversation, more tenderly than she was wont to speak; "but, you see, the old have their peculiarities. You must not think your father does not love you if he tells you he would rather you should stay with us. He may seem to you, and perhaps to others, hard and harsh, but the reasons for his conduct must be sought in the many trials of his life, in the utter seclusion in which he has lived; perhaps, in time, he may become more affable."

Who would have recognized in these words, this anxiety to show the father in the pleasantest light to his child, the harshly-judging old Frau? "My remembrances to your father," she called after the young girl as she left the room.

Frieda was evidently in a very bad humour; she lay back in the carriage, muffled up in her soft fur cloak, and for a long time she did not speak. At last she produced a pretty little porte-monnaie and shook out its contents into her lace pocket-hand-kerchief.

"There's not enough, Moritz," she said, playing with the coins. "You must pay Drewendt's bill; I'll have him make it out to-day."

Without more ado he took out his pocket-book,

and silently handed her a couple of notes. She took them, stuffed them into her porte-monnaie with the gold and silver, and put it into her pocket.

"Moritz, may I buy that little étagère for my drawing-room?" she asked, glancing up at him with a pleading look in her dark-blue eyes.

He turned towards her impatiently, but his irritation vanished at sight of the lovely face smiling so seductively beneath the dark fur cap.

"How devoted you are to such trash!" he said.
"Do as you please; but indeed we shall soon have to hold an auction, you have so many possessions.
What does the thing cost?"

"Oh, not much; a hundred marks, perhaps."

He was silent, and Elsie heard no more, for the carriage stopped at the major's, and the girl got out. Once more she passed through the narrow door and up the steep staircase. She stood hesitating outside her father's door, and finally entered the kitchen.

Old Barbara had just put a couple of wineglasses on a waiter, and was trying, with trembling hands, to uncork a bottle of Rhine wine.

"Give it to me, Barbel," the girl said, smiling. "I am stronger."

"Goodness gracious!" the old woman almost screamed, with delight. "Elsie! Fräulein Elsie! How tall you've grown! Yes, yes, 'tis always the way; for ten years we've had no visitors, and to-day they are flocking in from every quarter, Fräulein." Elsie put the bottle of wine on the waiter. "Never mind the Fräulein, Barbel; call me Elsie, as you used to do. Who is talking with papa? I should like to go to him."

"Only guess," old Barbara said, with a grin, as she tied on a clean apron. "Yes, yes, you're curious too, Elsie, like your mother. Why,"—and she came close up to the girl,—"'tis the Bennewitzer. I didn't recognize him; up comes an elegant gentleman, dressed in black, and asks after the Herr Major, your father. If I had gone to tell your father he never would have seen him; but I just opened the door—and—there they are together. Now let them fight it out; 'twill do no harm, Elsie. You know they've always been like cat and dog to each other because of the estate. And now—but suppose you carry in the waiter, Elsie."

"Did papa call for wine?" the young girl asked.

"Oh, heavens above! He never thinks of anything like that," the old woman replied, with a shrug; "but I know what should be done when a relative comes to pay a visit."

At this moment the major's voice was heard so loud and angry that old Barbara, who was handing the waiter to the young girl, set it down again in terror. "Mercy upon us! Elsie, he is raging," she stammered. And indeed there fell upon the ear of the trembling girl words and phrases that could

come only from a man in a violent passion. In an instant she hurried across the passage, opened a door, and stood, very pale, but perfectly self-possessed, on the threshold of her father's room.

"I do not disturb you, papa?" she asked, going up to the old major, who, standing in the middle of the room, with a letter in his hand, and his face flushed with passion, stared at her as at an apparition.

The dignified man standing by the window bore not the slightest resemblance to his angry cousin; he was outwardly a gentleman from head to foot, and inwardly, also, he seemed to have entirely preserved an aristocratic repose; at least his face, with the melancholy lines about the mouth, was perfectly calm.

"You do not disturb us in the least, Fräulein von Hegebach," he said, with a bow. "Your coming is a welcome interruption. I was just trying to explain a misunderstanding to your father, and my task was rendered more difficult by fresh misunderstandings."

"Papa!" The lovely young creature threw her arms around the peevish old man. "Dear papa, I am so glad to be with you again!" And she nestled close to him, as if she would fain shield him from all annoyance.

Major von Hegebach was evidently entirely at a loss. With one hand he stroked his daughter's

fair hair, while with the other he pushed her away. "By and by, my child. I have—I have business with this gentleman——"

"Fräulein von Hegebach does not disturb us in the least, cousin. I think we might sit down now, and discuss all this matter calmly and quietly as gentlemen should in a lady's presence." And the Bennewitzer drew his chair up to the table, which was littered with newspapers and cigars. "I pray you, Wilhelm," he went on, placing a chair for Elsie, "let us talk calmly. You know I have come here with the best intentions, and you know, too, which of us has been most bitterly tried."

Hegebach had sat down in obedience to an imploring gesture from Elsie, and for a moment silence reigned in the smoky old den.

"Neither of us, Wilhelm," the Bennewitzer began afresh, "could help the fact that our uncle—God forgive him!—made the will which he did; that is done, and is past recall. Your claims, as you must have known before you brought them forward, and as your lawyer must have told you, are entirely unwarrantable. I have no right to divide the estate,—the inheritance that is now mine; but I have a right to make the proposal which I made to you some time ago, and which I made with the best and kindest intentions. Accept that proposal, Wilhelm,—if not for your own sake, for your daughter's."

"I shall not accept it," said the major; "and I shall—await further developments."

"For God's sake, be reasonable, Wilhelm!" the Bennewitzer entreated, with a glance at the young girl.

"I am perfectly aware of what I am doing, thank you." The old man moved a bundle of papers, and shut down the lid of a cigar-box with hands that trembled with nervous agitation. Elsie looked helplessly from one to the other.

"The matter in question is very easily explained, Fräulein von Hegebach," the Bennewitzer said, turning to the girl. "Your father thinks that, since I have had the misfortune to lose both my sons, the natural heirs of the family estate, he can lay claim to it. I do not know how he came to make that claim through his lawyer; he must have been very badly advised. I came to-day to prevent the beginning of this perfectly fruitless suit, and I want—"

"To put a padlock upon my lips," the major angrily interrupted. "I thank you again for offering as a gift what is mine by right."

The Bennewitzer arose. "I meant well, Wilhelm. I have no intention of insisting upon anything. Assert your rights."

He took his hat, with its broad band of crape, from a chair near him, and held out his hand to the young girl. "It would please me much to see

my lovely cousin again under more auspicious circumstances. Good-by, Fräulein von Hegebach."

The next moment the door had closed behind him.

"Papa," the girl said, sadly, after the old man, as if entirely forgetful of her presence, had rummaged for a while among the papers and letters in a drawer of his secretary. "Papa!"

Hegebach started, and passed his hands across his forehead.

"Papa, I should like to talk with you a little." He stopped his rummaging and stared at her.

"Papa, I want to tell you how glad I should be to come to you and keep house for you, read to you in the evenings, and make your room neat and comfortable." There must have been something in her voice that compelled his attention. He sat down and leaned his head upon his hand.

"And I should be so glad to nurse you, papa, when you have your attacks, and then you would not be so lonely, for—Aunt Ratenow——" the clear, girlish voice trembled, and then broke with pain and distress. "Let me stay with you, papa; I am so sorry for you!" she cried, clasping her arms about the old man's neck. "You are always so lonely that you cannot be happy."

"No, Elsie, it will not do," he replied; but he did not repel the soft embrace. "You can have no luck in life, poor child, since you must call such a

beggar as I father. It ought never to have been. But he to whom fate bears a grudge need hope for no good fortune. I told your aunt Ratenow how much I have to live upon,—twenty thalers a month. It sounds ridiculous, does it not? The rest of my pension goes to liquidate former debts, which must be honourably discharged, and which it will take years to pay."

"Papa!" she would have remonstrated, but he cut short the words upon her lips.

"The best plan is the one which Frau von Ratenow proposed to me yesterday. You can undertake the education of the little Ratenows, and you will receive a sufficient salary, besides being treated there like a child of the house. It is better luck than hundreds in your position can boast, and we will—wait," he concluded.

The girl had sprung to her feet, and she looked at the speaker with a face grown very pale, although she said not a word. One thing became suddenly clear to her, that no sweet, golden, careless girlhood awaited her. The dear old castle arose before her mind's eye veiled in gray shadows; she had no right to a home there, she must purchase it by rendered service. She was suddenly thrust out from the place of a child into that of a servant. Yes; how could she have supposed that in this world love and kindness could be bestowed for nothing? They had educated a governess for themselves, that was all.

Her girlish heart was filled with bitterness unutterable. She felt no fear of labour, only the pain of a terrible disappointment.

"Good-by, papa," she said, at last, putting on her hat. "I shall come and see you as often as——" she hesitated; it was upon her lips to say, "as often as my employers——" but Moritz's dear, kind face arose before her mind; "as often as I am allowed," she concluded.

He held out his hand. "All will be better some day, Elsie; you are still so young."

She assented. "Good-by, papa." And then she went. In what a different mood she had come! As she stood gloomily at the street door the elegant equipage that had brought her here drove around the corner. Moritz was coming for her; she must wait for him.

"Why, how you look, Elsie!" he said, as he sprang out to help her into the carriage. "Has any one vexed you, dear old girl?" And he took her hand.

"When do you wish me to begin my instruction?" was the reply, as the carriage rolled off; "and would you not like first to examine my testimonials?"

He looked up. The tone of the voice was hard, and the lips that uttered the words were tightly compressed.

"Instruction?" he asked. "Oh, yes; my mother,

I believe, was going to ask you to bestow a little attention upon the children. Would you like it, Elsie?"

"It is all settled," she replied. "I have not been consulted."

"Has any one wounded you, Elsie? I am sure no one meant to do so," he said, gently, gazing at her pale face.

She looked at him with eyes brimming with tears. "Moritz, I will do anything; I will take care of your children day and night, but do not offer me pay; I cannot bear it!" she sobbed.

"But, Elsie, Elsie, how you misunderstand!" he exclaimed, in dismay. And as the carriage just then stopped before the door of the castle, he said, "I pray you go up to Aunt Lott, Elsie. I must speak for a moment with my mother. I will come up directly and explain to you——"

Elsie was standing in her room, looking out into the storm and rain; she had ceased weeping, and had grown very quiet. Yesterday lay far behind her; she seemed to have dreamed it. Why had she forgotten what Aunt Ratenow had repeated to her so often when she was a child: "You must learn to stand upon your own feet"? But who in a joyous circle of playmates, when life seems a bright May morning, remembers the cares of existence?

"Elsie," said a voice behind her. She turned and confronted Aunt Ratenow.

"I am sorry, Elsie, that you should misunderstand what was kindly meant. I cannot be a Providence to you. I must tell you again that your circumstances are not such as to allow you to flutter through life like some brilliant butterfly. part is that of the bee. If you consent to teach our children, it stands to reason that you should receive a suitable compensation for so doing. This I cannot spare you; only false pride could prompt you to refuse it. If you reflect, you will see this for yourself. Life is long, my child. I will not thrust the detested money into your hand; I will lay it by for you and let it accumulate. But understand, Elsie, no one wishes to force you to undertake this task. You are a guest beneath my roof, and shall remain so as long as you like; you must decide for yourself, my child."

"I accept the task, and I will do my best," the girl said, softly.

"That is right, Elsie; otherwise all is as it has always been. How is your father?"

"He was out of sorts, because of a dispute with the Bennewitzer. I met him at papa's."

"The Bennewitzer!" Frau von Ratenow exclaimed, so loud that the girl looked up, startled. "And you tell me this only incidentally! Did he see you?"

[&]quot;Yes, aunt."

[&]quot;And what did he want?"

Elsie paused for a moment. She felt convinced that her father was acting from a misconception of the right.

"It was about Bennewitz," she said. "My father, I believe, has entered suit to recover a share of the estate."

"Is he insane?" the old lady cried, flushing with anger; and then, reflecting that she was speaking to his daughter, she added, "You do not understand, Elsie. I do not mean any harm; but I must talk to your father. He'll have a pretty piece of work on his hands. How did the Bennewitzer look, Elsie?" And she patted the girl's cheek. "We will arrange ourselves most comfortably here for the winter," she added, not waiting for a reply.

"Aunt Lott," the young girl said, with a melancholy smile, as she entered the pretty, home-like room a little while afterwards,—"Aunt Lott, if I ever again forget a certain fact, will you remind me of it?"

"Of what, my rose-bud?"

"That I am a penniless girl."

And yet she could not always be thinking of it. The next morning she strolled through the autumn garden, and every tree seemed to nod to her and say, "Do you not remember me?" Every spot where she had played as a child whispered loving words of consolation to her wounded heart; the

sun shone bright and clear above the grand old house, and as she looked far abroad, every roof, every windmill, every hillock was familiar to her. No, she had a home; she was not poor.

How could she brood over sad thoughts in the midst of so much gayety and cordiality? How pleasant it was in the comfortable dining-room around the well-ordered table! How delightful to hear Aunt Ratenow recall some tale of by-gone days! It was like sudden sunshine when Frau Frieda laughed, and the children joined her with their clear treble, while Moritz sat in the seat of honour, carving the roast, and taking care of every one. "Elsie, have you no appetite? You must eat, my little girl. There is a tempting piece for you. There! is not that good?" And after dinner came the romp in the garden with the children, when Moritz was like a boy himself, and there was merriment and laughter without end.

And then the drives into the country, lying fair beneath the autumnal sun, with Frieda and Aunt Ratenow. Sometimes the young Frau's elegant coupé would roll swiftly through the streets of the town, and obsequious clerks would rush out from the shops before which it halted, and open the door for the ladies to alight. And there were always visitors in the evening. Johann would knock at Aunt Lott's door, bringing a request from the young madame that Fräulein von Hegebach would come

down-stairs. And in an instant Elsie's little hands were busy before the looking-glass, giving a last touch to the arrangement of her hair, or making some simple addition to her toilette, especially if the old servant added, "There is to be some music."

Who would have thought that the hours of hard work over her piano and singing-lessons would be followed by such a train of lovely sisters? And who could have dreamed that anything in the world could sing and lament as did the small, brown violin in Lieutenant Bernardi's hands?

The beginning of Elsie's duties was postponed for a while. She did not know that Moritz had privately said to his wife, "Dear Frieda, you certainly cannot wish to have the children put in training before January?" Therefore, when Elsie begged the young Frau to appoint a time for the children to begin, Frieda calmly replied that there was plenty of time yet. She couldn't think of having the children tied down to lessons before the second Moritz must have a school-room of January. arranged with suitable chairs, the eldest girl was growing so fast; and, besides, there would be no fixing the children's attention until Christmas had come and gone.

No remonstrance from Aunt Ratenow was of any avail; for Frieda's wishes, as those of the children's mother, were of course to be respected, and it was altogether too delightful for the young Frau to have a youthful companion during the time of her enforced retirement on account of her uncle's death to allow of her giving any heed to a 'sensible view of the matter.' And Moritz? Well, Moritz was, as usual, entirely governed by his wife, as the old Frau declared, under her breath, within the four walls of Aunt Lott's apartment.

Elsie found again in Frieda's charming blue drawing-room her former school-fellow, Fräulein Annie Cramm, who had of course returned to her parents after her confirmation, and had now been in society for nearly two years. Her features were as unformed as ever, her eyes as pale a blue, and her hair as hay-coloured; but she arranged this last with great care and neatness, and her gowns fitted her rather angular figure irreproachably.

"She is a goose," Frieda declared, frankly.

"But with golden feathers, my dear child," Aunt Ratenow added, "and that makes up for a great deal."

Elsie chattered away to Annie Cramm about old school-days, and the young lady even came up to Aunt Lott's rooms sometimes, where she could, upon occasion, sigh and look very sentimental as she discussed her partners at every ball to which she went. As she had a thin soprano voice, she was often present upon Frieda's musical evenings. She liked to sing solos, and her toilettes were very costly, although frequently most unsuitable for the

occasion, which made her a mark for Frieda's ridicule, the young Frau having a sovereign contempt for everything that was not 'chic.'

Elsie's plain black or white gowns passed with her as 'decently respectable.' She had at first contemplated replenishing the girl's more than modest wardrobe from her own superabundance, but here she met with most unexpected opposition from her husband, usually so docile and easy-tempered.

"If Elsie needs anything," he declared, "our mother will see that she is provided with it, as has always been the case. And, besides, what could she do with your cast-off gowns?—she is nearly a head taller than you. I do not choose to have her wear your old clothes, Frieda. Why impress the stamp of poverty upon her, in sight of everybody?"

And so the slender girl appeared every day in her simple black attire, a dress which set off her peculiar loveliness to the greatest advantage.

Matters at length went so far that on two days in the week the candles on the grand piano were lighted regularly at four in the afternoon, and there was a musical performance.

"I can play upon nothing except a comb," Moritz declared one afternoon, when Elsie came running down the stairs, with a roll of music in her hand, and met him in the hall, "and sometimes I whistle 'God save the King!' I shall come punc-

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tually to supper, and if a couple of songs should be sung afterwards, I shall like to hear them. I understand none of your symphonies. Good-by, Elsie; keep a song or two for me."

And, as he had nothing to do out of the house, he went straight to his mother's rooms, lighted a cigar, and seated himself comfortably in his dead The mother and son never father's arm-chair. were at a loss for conversation: the large household and the extensive estate supplied plenty of stuff for it; they talked of everything. The practical old Frau was always ready with good advice, and they were soon engaged in an agricultural discussion. Then several small bits of town gossip were mentioned, and finally Moritz remarked that he had met the Bennewitzer at Magdeburg a few days previously, and he had told him that his cousin was still implacable, and had entered suit against him.

"I suppose so," said his mother; "a fool never knows that there is a wall until he has bumped his head against it. I have talked myself hoarse, and written my hand lame, but he clings to what he calls his rights with a persistence worthy of a better cause."

She paused, but her knitting-needles clicked louder than usual; nothing provoked the old lady more than to have some one refuse to listen to her advice.

"Tell me, my boy," she asked, suddenly, "is it really only an enthusiasm for music that brings the black-haired lieutenant and his fiddle here so often?"

"I suppose so," Moritz replied; "they do nothing else, and they positively forget to eat and drink."

"Yes, but really, Moritz, I have no confidence in you; in such matters you are a perfect child. I shall go some time and judge for myself."

"Why, mother, Aunt Lott is always there, knitting and going into raptures."

"Yes; it suits her," Frau von Ratenow assented, between jest and earnest. "She's a good soul; but, in spite of her age, she's just the one to fall in love with Bernardi."

Moritz burst into a laugh.

"'Tis no laughing-matter, my boy. You once fell desperately in love, you know. And others also have eyes in their heads and warm, youthful blood in their veins!" As she spoke she had taken off her snowy muslin cap, and, passing her hand over her smooth, still brown hair, she added, "Give me the cap with lilac ribbons out of my drawer there, Moritz. Yes, that is the one; thank you. Now we will go and enjoy some music."

Her son closed the drawer and brushed the cigarashes from the sleeve of his dark-blue coat. "Yes, mother dear; if you mean that Elsie—"

"I mean nothing, Moritz. Will you come with me?"

"With pleasure; and you can convince yourseli' that there are no love-potions served in our drawing-room, you over-anxious mother."

The lamps and candles were lit in the drawing-room; they had just finished playing a concerto of Kreutzer's, and were discussing it eagerly when the mother and son entered the room. Frieda sat at the piano, trying over a difficult phrase; Lieutenant Bernardi had laid aside his violin and was standing beside Elsie, who was looking over some sheets of music; Annie Cramm and Aunt Lott were sitting together by the window,—they all looked flushed with enthusiasm.

"We wanted to hear a song or two," said Moritz, by way of explanation of their unexpected appearance; and Aunt Ratenow, with a sonorous "Good-evening, ladies; good-evening, my dear Bernardi," took her seat in the corner beside Aunt Lott. Moritz laughed to himself. She was no diplomatist, his grand old mother: she went straight to the point. It amused him immensely to observe her.

Fräulein Annie Cramm was prevailed upon to sing. Elsie sat down in the deep recess by the window, and her childlike face showed fair and sweet against the heavy blue curtains, that made a fine background. Bernardi went to the other end

of the room, where he stationed himself directly opposite her, standing in the shadow, leaning against Frieda's book-shelves.

"A very handsome fellow!" Frau von Ratenow acknowledged to herself. "So erect and finely formed, and with such excellent manners! No wonder if——"

Annie Cramm's high voice broke in upon her thoughts,—the shrill voice that so tried the narrow chest of the singer.

"Thank you, my dear,—very fine," the old lady said, when the song was ended, "but I do not understand it; it is too far up in the clouds for me."

"Mamma dear, what high treason! that was Wagner!" exclaimed Frieda.

"I do not know it," was the rejoinder, uttered with imperturbable calm.

"There! that is because you never will go to the opera with us when we are in Berlin," said her daughter-in-law.

"Child, I pride myself upon my nerves, but when I go there I admit that this generation excels me. I tremble in every limb at the end of the first act, and my only thought is, 'When will it be over?' You, who are always talking about your weak nerves, can endure it for hours. Elsie, will you not give us a simple song?"

The young girl, her cheeks flushed crimson, went to the piano.

"Let us try the old song with the new setting," said Frieda. Privately she was in a slight tremor of horror at her mother-in-law's views, and there were one or two discords in the few bars of prelude. But a full, rich contralto began,—

"Ah! who in this wide world like me is alone?

No father, no mother, no money my own.

I've nothing—no, nothing—to have or to keep,

Except my two brown eyes, with which I may weep.

"Far over the meadows loud whistles the wind.

Alas for my lover! he's faithless, unkind,

Because on my bosom no silver beads shine.

Ah! who ever dreamed of such sorrow as mine?

"Below me the water dark deep rushes by,
And all would be well if I only could die.
Three flowers, three roses, a shroud white as snow,
And sweet were my sleep, without trouble and woe."

"Brava, Elsie!" said the old lady, holding out her hand to the girl. The others were silent. Bernardi had taken up his violin, and he began to play the simple, mournful air of the song. Then followed wild billows of sound,—a bewitching chaos of notes, through which the theme rang clear, and finally came the cry of woe in the last verse.

While he played the young people gazed, lost, into each other's eyes. At the close, the brown

-

eyes of the girl, brimming with tears, sought the ground, and the flush upon her cheek had given place to a slight pallor; she sat quietly down beside Aunt Lott. Bernardi laid aside his violin, and all, except Aunt Ratenow, were loud in their praises.

"It is an old song," she said, at last, "with a new melody. Did you not say so, Frieda?"

"Elsie," she called, when they were taking their places at table and the young girl was about to sit down next to the lieutenant,—" Elsie, let Moritz or Aunt Lott sit there, and come here and give me a little help; my arm is lame again."

Elsie came with alacrity. But Moritz stared at his mother, in positive horror of these feminine stratagems. And so unnecessary, he thought. There sat the dangerous man, talking very quietly, peeling an orange for Frieda, whom he entertained with some town gossip. Conversation grew brisk and lively at the table, and when Moritz alluded to the last campaign the gentlemen became quite warm.

It was late when they rose from supper; the carriage had been waiting long in the wind and rain outside for Fräulein Annie Cramm. At last she put on her silken wraps and took her leave in the hall. "Herr Lieutenant, may I offer you a seat in my carriage?" she asked.

He was standing, with his cap under his arm, talking to Elsie. The spacious hall was dimly

lighted, but Annie saw him press a small, half-reluctant hand to his lips.

"Will you drive with me, Herr Lieutenant?" she asked again, rather impatiently; "it is late, and I am in a hurry."

"Thank you, Fräulein Cramm; the air will do me good. I prefer to walk," he replied, with his most courteous bow.

Annie Cramm drew her veil over her face, and forgot to bid Elsie Hegebach good-night. Moritz put her into her carriage, and then shook hands with the young officer who was coming down the steps. Young Herr von Ratenow stood looking after him for a few moments, then gazed around the court-yard and up into the sky, his eyes finally resting upon two upper windows, behind which a candle was burning.

Suddenly he began to whistle gently an air from 'Boccaccio,' and went into the house. "Frieda," he said to the pretty little lady who was closing the piano in the drawing-room, "is there not something in the wind?"

- "Is this a fresh discovery, Moritz?" she replied, laughing.
 - "Yes; between Bernardi and-"
- "Nonsense! she is too ugly," she interrupted him.
 - "No, no! I mean Elsie."
 - "Oh, good heavens!" she rejoined, negligently,

"if that is all, it is a simple impossibility; he has no idea of it."

"But if she, Elsie-?"

"What of it? I had two love-affairs before you came, Moritz, and I still live."

He did not hear her; the words of the song that the girl had sung suddenly occurred to him:

"Far over the meadows loud whistles the wind.

Alas for my lover! he's faithless, unkind."

"It would be rascally!" he said, passing his hand over his eyes.

And in an upper room a girl sat on the wide window-seat and held her hands clasped over her throbbing heart. She was not poor; she was so rich that she would not have exchanged her lot with that of any one in the world. Was it possible that life could be so fair? Was it possible that some one could love her dearly, so dearly as his eyes had said? She sat thus for a long while, gazing out at the lights of the little town, until one by one they were extinguished, and she heard Aunt Lott's quiet breathing in the next room. She was sleeping sweetly and soundly, quite forgetting, as she had always forgotten, to arise and say to her darling, "Child, what are you dreaming of? You are only a penniless girl!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEQUEL TO A SLEIGH-RIDE.

Winter had come outside, and at Christmas the snow was white and shining upon the quiet country and upon the roofs of the houses, and it went on snowing until New Year. The streets and roads were smooth and slippery as glass, and Moritz had his horses rough-shod; there was to be a sleighing-party, a large sleighing-party.

Young Frau von Ratenow, in a dark-blue velvet costume trimmed with fur, was putting on her gloves before the tall mirror in her bedroom. Moritz declared she looked made to be kissed, and that he really should enjoy the affair if only that terrible Bernardi were not going to drive Elsie!

His young wife slightly shrugged her shapely shoulders. "This perpetual anxiety about Elsie! Mamma talks of nothing else, nor do you; is she so much better than all other girls?"

"Yes," Moritz replied, warmly. "She has a deep, tender nature, and whatever she feels she feels with her whole soul. Superficial sentiment or flirtation of any kind is entirely foreign to the girl."

"You seem to have made a very close study of

this girl," was the rejoinder, uttered with apparent indifference; but Moritz knew every intonation of that flexible voice too well not to perceive that the speaker was irritated.

"Frieda, I pray you—— I have known her ever since she was born; as I know our children." His honest eyes gazed in positive dismay into the face that showed so fresh and blooming beneath the ostrich-feathers that shaded it. But she calmly buttoned the last button of her long glove and took up her dainty muff. "I believe the gentlemen are already in the drawing-room." And she hurried past, him, without taking any notice of the hand held out to her.

It was not the first time that the young Frau had spoken such words; she really thought it too odious for every one to be so anxious upon this girl's account. The girl was wonderfully well off. Who would have stirred a finger for her if she had been at home with her cross old father? And Mamma Ratenow was always dwelling upon the prevention of any misfortune, and Moritz, like her faithful echo, did the same. It had really grown too tiresome. What of it, if an officer did pay her attention? She might amuse herself if she chose,—no one could grudge her that; but there was no possible danger, for—he was far too sensible. Bernardi and Elsie! Ridiculous!

The flush of annoyance was still upon her cheek

when she entered the drawing-room to greet Captain von Franken and Lieutenant Bernardi, the two gentlemen who had begged to be allowed the honour of driving the ladies.

The captain, a tall, handsome man and a great admirer of Frieda's, laughingly bent his knee and handed to the young Frau, whom he was to drive, a bouquet of pale-yellow Southern roses.

Elsie, her face beaming with delight, held in her hand a bouquet of violets. "Oh, Frieda, look! snow and ice, and these exquisite flowers! It is like a dream!"

Yes, life was like a dream, a lovely dream: the sun lay so sparkling and glittering upon the snowy landscape; the air was so clear and cold, and of such exquisite purity; the bells jingled, and the procession of sleighs flew swiftly over the smooth road. How beautiful is the world when happiness has a home in the heart! Only once did a shadow pass over the young girl's face,—it was when, passing through Rosen Street, she looked up at the house where her father lived. He was standing at the window in dressing-gown and smoking-cap, but he never returned the eager nodding of the fair head below him. Papa was always so lost in thought; he really did not seem to know that he had a daughter.

But then the band began to play, and they talked together, Elsie and Bernardi, of nothing, and yet of so much. "My Christian name is Bernhard," he told her, as he wrapped the thick rug carefully about her.

"Bernhard Bernardi sounds oddly," thought Elsie.

"Your cousin is a veritable Providence to us all," he went on. "Where could we have danced this evening if not in the hall at the castle?"

"But where is Annie Cramm? Who is driving her?" Elsie asked.

He laughed, and showed his white teeth beneath his moustache.

"Ensign Hubert was ordered upon that service."

"Oh, how odious of you! Annie is so good."

"Good? Is that all? 'Tis not much."

"It is very much, sir." And the young girl's brown eyes grew gravely reproachful.

He could not but look at her constantly; he knew every line of that pure, fresh face; and it was delicious to drive beside this lovely creature, who was so different from the others, so—so—he did not know exactly what word to use to himself—so true-hearted, so absolutely feminine throughout her entire nature. And as he gazed at her he thought of his home and of his mother, and suddenly he seemed to be standing in the dear old-fashioned sitting-room, and beside him—she——

"There go hunger and thirst driving together,"

the fat Referendar Gölling, in the next sleigh, observed to Lieutenant von Rost, who was puffing forth the smoke of his fine cigar into the cool winter air. There was no lady in their sleigh; perhaps they had desired none. Lieutenant von Rost played the part of the 'eternally feminine.' He had a white kerchief about his arm, and manœuvred a huge crimson fan with much dexterity.

"A sleighing-party is not so bad, after all," the lieutenant said, yawning. "The supper at the castle is a consoling background. Bernardi is fairly in earnest, it seems to me."

"Good heavens! he can't be so insane as to entertain serious thoughts of——?" the Referendar asked.

"How can I tell?" the lieutenant yawned again.
"That's his affair. He knows, as well as anybody, that the old man is worth nothing."

"He's going it rather strong, my dear Rost; but he's a good-hearted fellow."

"Oh, yes, good enough; but just here his goodness of heart ends," the lieutenant explained, with a grimace that caused the eye-glass through which he had been watching the pair to drop from his eye.

Moritz drove last, with a pretty, young married woman. He was out of sorts, and kept on the lookout for Frieda and Elsie.

"Fräulein von Hegebach is far ahead, Herr von

Ratenow; Bernardi is driving her. He is a great deal at your house, is he not? I know one of his sisters. His father used to be the district physician here. They say he has a large practice in B——; but, I believe, nothing besides. So many children, you know, Herr von Ratenow."

"I am entirely familiar with his circumstances," Moritz said, coolly. He knew perfectly well what all this meant.

"Ah, indeed! Excuse me, my dear Herr von Ratenow," his companion said, in some surprise. "They know, then, at the castle, that he is a very poor match?"

In the mean while the castle was a perfect pandemonium, as old Frau von Ratenow impatiently said to Aunt Lott. The tables were laid in the dining-room, and the gardener was emptying his greenhouses into the hall where they were going to dance. Frieda had laid aside her mourning punctually on the first of January; this was her first large entertainment, and had been a sudden inspiration. The idea had occurred to her as she left a dance on the previous evening, and early in the morning she had set every one in the house at work.

"Only leave me in peace," her mother-in-law had entreated. "Send me the children, if you want to get them out of the way; that is all the help I can give you."

In Frieda's dressing-room the charming pale-blue silk gown, with every accessory of her toilette, was laid out awaiting her.

In Elsie's room a pair of wrinkled hands had arranged the white muslin which the girl had received for a Christmas-present; and two little bronze slippers, small as those of a child, were upon the table before the old lady, who had much enjoyed ornamenting them with bows. It was no trifle, this taking her foster-child to a dance for the first time. She had put on her gray satin, had lighted a lamp, and had taken a novel of Hackländer from her shelves with which to beguile the time until Elsie should appear, when she would help her to dress quickly.

It gradually grew quieter below-stairs: the preparations were all made; it was the stillness before the storm. Then came the jingling of sleigh-bells; there they were, Moritz, Frieda, Elsie, and the entire company.

Only a few more moments, and the girl's light step came hurrying along the corridor; the door was opened, and there she stood, flushed and breathless. "Good-evening, my dear little aunt," she cried, putting her arms about the old lady's neck. A breath of fresh, cool, snowy air was wafted into the room with her.

"Was it pleasant, darling? Did you enjoy it? Come, drink your tea." But the young girl declined this with thanks. She hurriedly ran into her bedroom, where she stood for a while at the window, forgetting to take off her hat and wraps.

Aunt Lott went in to help her. "Why, Elsie, there you still stand, and it is high time to dress!" She brought the light, and began to take off the girl's cloak. "Why, what is the matter, dear? are you crying?"

The girl did not answer: she hastily began to dress; but she could not arrange her hair to her satisfaction. Three times her trembling hands put up the heavy braids, and the rose would not stay in its place.

"That is right; it is just where it should be," said Aunt Lott. "You are not usually so vain."

Yes,—"not usually." Aunt Lott never dreamed whom the child was bent on pleasing to-night.

At last she was dressed. "Aunt Lott, I feel frightened." And she shivered nervously.

"Why, what is the matter with you, child? You have caught cold sleighing."

"No, no. Come, aunt."

"Won't you take a few drops of eau de Cologne?"

She did not reply; she was standing still, gazing with a strangely blissful expression into space. Again she seemed to hear her name uttered softly, "Elsie," and then a few simple words,—"Hap-

piness! What is happiness, if it is not this moment?"

His voice had trembled as he spoke. Coming home he had told her of his parents, of his dear, kind mother, and of how she liked to hear him His father had played the violin, too; and he could perfectly remember sitting in his mother's lap in the twilight, when he was a very little boy, listening, rapt, to his father's playing as he walked to and fro in the room with his violin. Sometimes the hand that held the bow would drop by his side, and he would pause to kiss his wife and child. Ah, yes, the little violin had seen a deal of happiness; that was why it sang so sweetly. "Ah, happiness! What is happiness, if it is not this present moment?" Suddenly they had clasped hands, and Elsie had burst into tears; but beneath the tears her young heart prayed and exulted, and above them arched the heavens sparkling with stars.

"Pray come, Elsie," Aunt Lott entreated. "I think we are the last."

She followed the gray satin train like one in a dream; she dreaded to see him again in the bright candle-light, and her heart throbbed loud and expectantly.

There was a brilliant assemblage in the brightlylighted hall and the adjoining drawing-room; cardtables were set out in Moritz's library, and Frau von Ratenow was already seated with the cards

for whist before her. She was talking with an elderly gentleman, when Elsie went up to her to kiss her hand. The old lady actually stared at her for a moment, the girl looked so strikingly beautiful. She patted her cheek, and followed her with her eyes as she moved through the throng, her head carried proudly, her simple gown setting off the beauty of her figure and her white neck and arms. She stopped beside Annie Cramm, who looked particularly cross and sallow beneath her wreath of daisies. In her rich toilette of crimson silk, trimmed with costly lace, she resembled a wax dummy placed in a shop-window to display costumes. Everything about her was of the most elegant description, from her satin slippers to her point-lace fan and the diamond butterfly that fastened the velvet ribbon around her scrawny neck.

"What extraordinary fashions prevail at the present time!" the old Frau muttered. "I wonder how Annie manages to dance, laced so tightly as she is. And, heavens, how it looks!"

The first notes of a waltz were heard; in an instant all had found their partners; it was a gorgeous picture in a brilliant frame.

"Where is Elsie, Lott? I do not see her," the old Frau asked.

"There, there," Aunt Lott, who had just come up, replied. "My dear Ratenow, the child does not dance, she flies!" she cried, in ecstasy, putting

up her eye-glass that she might see her darling more clearly.

- "That is real enjoyment, madame," the old gentleman with gold spectacles remarked. "Good heavens! yes—eighteen."
- "Tell me, Councillor," Frau von Ratenow asked, "are you not the Bennewitzer Hegebach's lawyer?"
 - "I have that honour, madame."
 - " Well---?"
 - "Well, the major has lost his suit, of course."
- "Of course," Frau von Ratenow assented. "Does he know it?"
- "He was to learn the decision to-day, madame. I am curious to know the effect it will have upon him."

Frau von Ratenow looked suddenly at the speaker with anxiety in her eyes. "Do you not think it will quiet him?"

"Not I," was the reply. "So long as the old crank lives he will be in hot water."

The dance was ended; the couples wandered into the drawing-room or retired to delicious nooks among the laurels and orange-trees. Bernardi led Elsie into Frieda's pretty little boudoir. The girl was looking for its owner, to lighten for her, if she might, the duties of hospitality. There was no one there except the two little girls, who, in their starched white dresses, were seated together in a

large arm-chair, busy with one of mamma's pretty books. Frieda's greyhound sat watchfully by.

Elsie sat down beside the children and began to talk with them. The eldest laid the book upon her knee. Bernardi stood by, admiring the lovely picture. The girl felt his gaze resting upon her; she looked up, and their eyes met. There was that in his glance before which her own fell.

"We shall soon begin to have lessons," she said, stroking the hair back from the brow of the eldest child.

"I can read now, Elsie; listen." And the child read, pointing with her little finger to the words beneath one of the plates in the book:

"' Love can conquer all things.
A lie! said the penny.'"

Elsie looked at the picture: it was an illustration to 'German Mediæval Wit and Wisdom.' A bridal train was just ascending the church steps; the gallant bridegroom was conducting his gorgeously-attired bride; a large and stately company followed them. On one side of the picture stood a girl in mean attire, wearing no ornament save two long, fair braids of hair. She was turning away from the gay procession, and, with her face buried in her apron, was crying bitterly. Bernardi looked at the picture over Elsie's shoulder.

The little girl asked him if he did not think it a pretty picture. He did not answer.

"Oh, Bernardi, a word with you," Lieutenant von Rost was suddenly heard to say, as he came across the room and took his comrade's arm.

"What do you want, Rost?" Bernardi asked, when they reached the next room.

"Bernardi," the officer said, taking his eye-glass out of his eye, "you and I have always been able to put up with a frank word from each other. I am going to speak one to you now. Ask for leave of absence for a while, or have yourself transferred, or marry Annie Cramm, if you choose——"

Bernardi grew pale to the lips. "You must speak more plainly, Rost."

"More plainly? With pleasure. You are in debt, mon ami, although not desperately so. You have no rich uncle or aunt whose heir you are, and your father's treasure is not laid up in this world. More plainly still?" he added, interrogatively. "You seem to have difficulty in understanding many things of late, or you would some time since have perceived, from the constraint of Ratenow's manner towards you, the kind of sentiments generally entertained with regard to your relations with this hospitable house. Of course I do not know how far you have gone, or whether you can withdraw with honour. If this is impossible, I beg to assure you of my sympathy."

Without another word, he passed his comrade and approached Elsie, who was still apparently listening to the children's prattle. She had put the book upon the table, and was given over to blissful thoughts.

"This dance, I think, is mine, Fräulein von Hegebach," he said. And, talking gayly, he led her out into the hall.

Bernardi was left in great distress of mind; with a gloomy frown upon his brow he passed through the room towards the hall, and paused beside Moritz, in the door-way. It was true; Herr von Ratenow, usually so cordial, was quite cool towards him. Had it gone so far that the very sparrows on the roofs were chattering about it? He stroked his moustache and reflected. Rost was right; among all his relatives there was no wealthy uncle or aunt.

"Oho, my dear colonel!" he suddenly heard Frau von Ratenow say, "that is a matter of opinion." The words were spoken loudly and as if in warning.

He turned and looked into Moritz's library. The old lady, in her rich black silk, sat opposite the colonel of his regiment at the whist-table; she was dealing, and on her face there was the stern expression peculiar to it when she was arming to do battle for some one of her opinions.

"Those views," she said, "are not mine. I have

seen too much unhappiness result from what is called a feeling of honour. I will give you an instance."

She had finished her deal and laid her clasped hands on the cards. It suddenly seemed to Bernardi that she was speaking so loud because she had just seen him in the door-way. Involuntarily he assumed an attitude of attention.

"She was a friend of mine, colonel. You surely knew Major von Welsleben and his wife? Well, you see they had known and loved each other before they were well out of their baby-frocks. In those early years there is small thought of the prose of existence. Is that what you would say, colonel? Well, then, young people ought to be reminded that it is their bounden duty to arouse from their moonshine dreams of 'love and a cottage,' and to acknowledge that there is no living on love and roses alone. Well, they were betrothed. It was an endless engagement; he was a soured man and she a nervous girl when the parson finally pronounced the blessing upon their melancholy marriage. And now mark what followed, colonel. You just now maintained that a feeling of honour should prompt a man to betroth himself to a girl after showing her frankly that he loved her. An entirely wrong view of the matter, my dear colonel. My old Hans, who has been with me thirty-two years, and is not the wisest of his kind, said to me one evening,

when he was spreading the table, 'Madame, the table-cloth will positively not fit; if I pull it one way it is too short the other. I have been working over the thing for an hour.' It was just so with the Welslebens; they have been pulling the table-cloth first on this side and then on that, and it has never been large enough. Children came, and they were still more straitened; there were demands made upon them on all sides; joy vanished from the household, and when the bell rang, the poor mother started with dread lest it should be one of those dreadful bills, so often presented, so seldom paid. She worried herself into an invalid state, and he grew fonder of a glass of wine than was good for him. Now let me ask you, colonel, when——"

Bernardi heard no more. He suddenly confronted Frieda, and begged for a waltz. She thanked him, but refused, saying, "My dear Bernardi, take pity upon Fräulein Cramm." He bowed and left the room.

Elsie's brown eyes were searching for something. Lieutenant von Rost knew perfectly well what it was. He was terribly sorry for the girl,—as sorry as he could be for anything. He would have liked to conjure up a couple of thousand thalers a year for Bernardi, that those pretty little feet might trip along the path of life beside him. "'Pon honour she is charming!"

Bernardi, meanwhile, was striding up and down

the broad garden-path in agitated haste. 'Whether you can withdraw:——' the words rang in his ears. He grew giddy, and felt as if he could have strangled the man who uttered them. But in truth they were all right; and that was the very devil of it! Could he withdraw without giving cause for gossip? Yes, he should break no promise; he had not yet spoken the decisive word. It would have been said, perhaps, in another hour. And yet she must have read a thousand times in his eyes, as he had seen in her clear, brown, childlike orbs, that they loved each other dearly.

'Views' indeed! The old Frau's picture had been so horribly dreary, had shown so hopeless a perspective! He brushed his hair back from his brow; a melody suddenly occurred to him, set to simple words:

"Far over the meadows loud whistles the wind.

Alas for my lover! he's faithless, unkind."

And again he saw the picture the song had conjured up, and the weeping girl took on the face and form of Elsie von Hegebach.

No, he could no longer withdraw; he would not withdraw. He could not live if Elsie von Hegebach should regard him as faithless and false. He had clasped her hand in his in a moment of bliss, and love was too holy, and women too sacred, in his eyes to—— There must be some way out of this

terrible difficulty. If the worst came to the worst, he would resign from the army. Suddenly he strode hastily back to the house, and through the hall to the card-room.

"Madame," he bowed to old Frau von Ratenow, "may I ask you for a brief private conference?"

He spoke low, and looked calmly into the shrewd face turned towards him in surprise.

She did not reply immediately, but put down her cards.

"Go into my sitting-room, and I will follow you shortly," she said, in as low a tone as his own. It was well that the others were busy with their cards, and that the music was especially loud.

Frau von Ratenow looked after him as he vanished behind the portière. "Here it comes," she said to herself. "My dear judge, will you take my hand for a quarter of an hour? Yes? Thank you." And, passing through the dancing-room, she followed the young officer to her room. It was lighted only by a candle, lit in haste, and from the gloom a pale, serious face confronted her.

- "Well, my dear Bernardi?"
- "Madame, you just now pronounced a hard sentence upon—the——" he hesitated.
- "I know what you mean. You would not force me to retract my words?" she asked.

The tone was jesting, but her eyes were grave, almost stern.

- "Do you, madame, admit of no exception?"
- "None," she replied, briefly, and sat down in the nearest chair.

"Not when a resolute, honest will is allied to a heart full of genuine affection?"

He was profoundly moved. The old lady looked up at him almost compassionately.

- "Ah, good heavens! that is what they all say, and what they all think. A honey-sweet idea, Bernardi, such as lovers are prone to conceive."
- "I would resign from the army, madame. It is true that our rank has its conventional requirements. The lot of an officer without means is pitiable. I never would offer it to Elsie von Hegebach. I——"
- "Elsie von Hegebach?" Frau von Ratenow arose, and her heavy silk gown rustled as she approached the young man. "If you are thinking of Elsie von Hegebach, let me tell you she is a penniless girl, and she never would allow a man to give up his career for her sake,—to drag out a discontented, disappointed existence by her side. She is far too unpretending for that, my dear Bernardi; and as for you, I am firmly convinced that you are too honourable to propose such a course to a child who does not yet understand what binding herself for life means. Hitherto she has never known deprivation."

She spoke loudly and eagerly, and she went on: "Do you suppose that when you have laid aside

your uniform you can live like a day-labourer? or do you think that in any profession people subsist upon air? From their earliest childhood men are too spoiled for that nowadays. My dear Bernardi, I did not think you were so unreasonable."

"I love Fräulein von Hegebach," he rejoined, looking steadily into her indignant eyes.

"Yes, you have plunged in over head and ears. I saw it coming, to my sorrow."

"And I am loved in return."

"Indeed!" The old lady tossed back her capstrings angrily. "What does such a child know of love? Don't tell me of that, Bernardi; at her years girls have no judgment. And even if——"

"And even if, madame?" he repeated. "And even if?"

"And even if it were so, she will forget it, Bernardi. No, no," she went on. "Let us have no nonsense. I will believe that you have fallen in love with the child: she is a pretty girl; but—you will not die of it. I must seriously entreat you, my dear lieutenant, to consider this conversation at an end. It is an impossibility, and neither your parents nor Elsie's father, neither I, nor my son, could consent to it. I cannot compose any fine phrases about 'great honour,' and so forth; you know that I deem you an honourable gentleman. Do not make the child unhappy. I mean kindly by you and by her."

"I break no promise given to Fräulein von Hegebach; it is far enough from my intention to make her unhappy. Accept my thanks, madame."

He bowed formally, and would have left the room.

"Stay, Bernardi! I cannot let you leave me so!" cried Frau von Ratenow; and, with her rapid gesture to arrest his departure, the diamond on her hand sparkled like a tiny lightning-flash in the dim room. "First promise me that you will keep aloof from the child in future."

"I shall leave town as soon as possible, madame."

"I thank you, my dear Bernardi."

When the door had closed behind him, she stood for a long while with bowed head on the spot where he left her. Then she passed her hand across her forehead as if to brush away unpleasant thoughts.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," she said a few minutes afterwards in the card-room; "I am at your command again. What! have we the rubber, judge?"

And the evening passed. They danced together once more. He was very gay—Lieutenant Bernardi—the young ladies thought; the gentlemen said he had taken a little more champagne than was exactly good for him. He thrust into his pocket a pink knot of ribbon picked up from the floor as Elsie floated past him, he clasped two trembling little hands once more in his own, and

then retired with the most graceful of bows, and without one glance into the eyes turned upon him so pleadingly. Outside in the street, he thrust his hand through Lieutenant von Rost's arm.

- "For Heaven's sake, do not go home yet!" he exclaimed, loudly; and the crowd of unmarried men betook themselves to the club.
- "Well," Dölling asked Lieutenant von Rost, pointing to Bernardi, who was talking loudly to an elder comrade,—"well, what is up?"
- "Oh," was the reply, "he has it badly; but he'll get over it."
- "Ah, aunt, don't go to sleep yet," Elsie begged. She had put on a wrapper, and was seated on the edge of Aunt Lott's bed.
- "Come, tell me all, my darling," the injudicious aunt, with the heart of a child, rejoined.
- "I love him so dearly!" the rosy lips whispered. Then they said no more, but silently clasped each other's hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER SUNSHINE COMES RAIN.

The day after such an entertainment is the same in every house: the ladies look worn, the men have something of a headache, the rooms are not quite in their old order, the servants are sleepy. Breakfast is the pleasantest part of the morning, however. It was nearly twelve o'clock when the family assembled for this meal. Frau von Ratenow found a good deal of fault,—she was not in the best of humours; Frieda yawned continually, and Aunt Lott revelled in her recollections and minutely described several toilettes.

"Where is Elsie?" Moritz asked, at last, having hitherto eaten and drunk in silence.

"She is coming directly, Moritz," Aunt Lott replied. "She waited to put on her hat, for immediately after breakfast she is going to see her father; he is not quite well."

"I thought so," said old Frau von Ratenow.

"Did not the child look bewitching, cousin?"
Aunt Lott asked.

"Oh, yes," was the cool reply. "When do the children's lessons begin?"

"Not for some time yet," Moritz calmly declared. "I propose postponing them to Easter; and I wanted to suggest to you, Aunt Lott, that you should reverse your usual plan, and go now for the prescribed eight weeks in your Institute, and take Elsie with you."

Aunt Lott's good old face changed colour. "Go now?" she stammered, "when Elsie is enjoy——Pray, Moritz——"

"And it doesn't suit me at all," said Frieda.
"I would far rather the children began to learn to sit still."

"Oh, yes, Frieda," Aunt Lott cried, more tragically than before; "do all that you can to prevent it. For the child to go away now would be death to her happiness."

The young Frau laughed merrily. "Aunt Lott, you deserve to have a monument erected for you while you are alive,—a monument under a weeping-willow and wreathed with roses."

"'Tis not worth while to be always rhyming hearts and darts, Cousin Lott," Frau von Ratenow loudly declared. "I should be extremely sorry to think that you had aided in bringing about a state of affairs of which we utterly disapprove."

The old Fräulein's face had grown very pale. "I have done nothing towards it, Ratenow, my dear," she said, gravely, and in a slightly offended

tone. "No one can bring it about; it is a miracle worked by Heaven. It comes——"

"It comes," Frieda interrupted her, "yes,

'It comes, like fragrance breathed from flowers Through the warm night air, fresh with showers, When from the clouds bright moonlight breaks.'"

"Yes, yes," said Frau von Ratenow, "all very fine for a girl's album; but this is a different affair. But don't distress yourself; she can keep quiet, and will be perfectly reasonable."

"How many girlhoods have been wrecked by that word!" Aunt Lott murmured.

"There is nothing about the matter to laugh at, however, Frieda." The old lady's look was bent reprovingly upon the fair laughing face of her daughter-in-law.

Frieda was just opening her lips to reply, when the curtains of the portière parted, and Elsie entered. Her whole being seemed transfigured, her brown eyes sparkled, her rosy cheeks glowed. Her clear, bright 'good-morning' was like sudden sunshine in the room.

"Your father is not well?" Aunt Ratenow asked, kindly.

"I am sorry to say he is not, dear aunt. I am going to him immediately."

"There is a thaw," said Moritz; "remember to put on thick boots."

"And come to my room when you return," Frau you Ratenow added.

A servant entered. "Lieutenant Bernardi's regards," he said, handing Moritz a note.

Aunt Lott suddenly felt her hand clasped in another that trembled. Moritz read the note, his face changing oddly as he did so. He read it twice, and then said, without looking up, "Lieutenant Bernardi desires to present his respects to us all, and is sorry not to do so in person, but he is too pressed for time. He leaves this evening at six o'clock for H——, where he has been assigned a command in place of a brother officer who has been taken ill. He begs that his violin and his music may be delivered to the bearer of this, and hopes that the ladies took no cold yesterday evening, and that they will hold him in kindly remembrance."

"Go and get the violin from the drawing-room," Moritz said to the servant; and then he wrote a few lines on one of his visiting-cards which he took from his pocket, put it into an envelope, and handed it to the man when he returned with the violin, saying, "Our regards to Herr Lieutenant Bernardi."

Two brown eyes looked with a dazed expression after the violin-case as it disappeared behind the portière. It had grown very quiet in the room; nothing was heard save the rattle of the knife and

fork which Frau von Ratenow took up and put down again upon her plate. In such a silence the peasants say an angel is flying through the room; this time it was an angel of death, who blighted a lovely infant bud of hope just as it had begun to shoot up in a human heart.

Moritz tried to say something, and he forced himself to look up at the ghastly pale young face that confronted him at the table. "Well, Elsie, shall we go to town? Shall we look after some school-books for the children?" Involuntarily he held out his hand to her across the table.

"Come, children, we have been sitting here long enough. Gesegnete Mahlzeit." Frau von Ratenow arose, and Elsie left the room, 'to get something,' she said, in a low tone.

"Heaven have mercy upon the poor child!" said Aunt Lott, almost crying. "She loves him; they love each other."

"Bernardi is an honourable fellow," Frau von Ratenow declared. "Do not cry, Lott," she continued; "I have seen it coming for a long while; but such an old woman as I has very old-fashioned ideas. Now it is over."

"Good-morning," said Frieda. "I am going to dress. What a pity that Bernardi is going! Our delightful musical evenings must come to an end." She vanished, and Moritz heard her singing and playing with her little son in the next room.

- "Moritz," said Frau von Ratenow, "in Thomas the jeweller's window there is a little enamel bracelet. Elsie admired it the other day; buy it, and have the bill sent to me. Good-morning."
- "Pray, Aunt Lott, go up-stairs and look after the girl," Moritz said, with nervous haste.
- "Is it all over, then?" the old lady asked, with the tears rolling down her cheeks,—"all?"
- "But, my dear aunt, what else could you expect?"

She turned away, wiped her eyes, and began slowly to ascend the staircase.

Elsie was sitting at the window, looking out into the garden; the snow had melted from the trees, and their boughs waved black and dripping in the wind. The skies were veiled in gray, and a fine rain was falling, which blurred the view of the distant landscape. Aunt Lott stirred the fire in the porcelain stove,—the girl must not see that she had been crying; then she took her duster and passed it over the polished table, where not a speck of dust was lying; she wanted to speak, and did not know what to say.

The door into the young girl's bedroom was open; in her embarrassment the old lady went into it. There stood the pretty bed with its white muslin curtains, and at its head hung the mother-of-pearl crucifix which Sister Beata had given her. In the corner by the stove was the baby-house,

which had been arranged for her when she was little, with its hundred tiny childish toys, and upon the table underneath the mirror stood yesterday's bouquet of half-faded violets, carefully placed in water. All was silent save for the ticking of the clock in the next room.

A door was heard to open, and then Moritz's voice, gentle as if speaking to a child, "Elsie, Elsie, how pale you are, my dear! What is the matter?"

"With me? Nothing at all, Moritz."

"You are our dear, sensible girl, Elsie."

She started up from her chair. "Do not say anything to me, Moritz!" she exclaimed; and, running past Aunt Lott, who had re-entered the apartment, and who held out her hands to her, she went into her own bedroom, and locked the door behind her.

He turned to the window. "Poor child! poor child! There she goes, Aunt Lott," he went on, after a pause, "in her hat and wrap. I ought not to have allowed her to go out alone. Where can she be going? She is turning to the left through the garden."

"She always goes that way to the church-yard, Moritz; it is nearer. She takes the small street past the Gertruden chapel."

In fact, she was going to the graveyard. Her head was confused; she hardly knew whither she was going. The snow was very soft, and walking through it very laborious. Suddenly she became tired,—terribly tired. Not far from the church she met Annie Cramm. The young lady had her skates hung over her arm, and she seemed to be in a great hurry, as she crossed the bridge in her elegant skating-dress. "Good-morning, Elsie; how are you?" she asked, with a searching glance at the girl's pale face.

"Very well, thank you, Annie," she replied.

"Are you going to the church-yard? Heavens! how elegiac! so early in the morning, and after such a merry entertainment!"

Elsie only nodded.

"I'll go with you to the gate, Elsie, if you will let me. Do you know that you are become a famous person in our little town within the last twenty-four hours?" she chattered away. "Papa went to his club this morning, and only imagine! he informed us as the last piece of news—I nearly died of laughing—that Bernardi has exchanged with Lieutenant P—— because you refused him; directly, or through your aunt, I forget which. I said at once it was nonsense. Bernardi! For you know, Elsie, and you will forgive me for saying it, he never could marry a penniless girl."

The girl's brown eyes looked at the speaker with an expression of such utter misery that Annie was startled and ceased her chatter. "Well, good-by," she said; "perhaps I shall come to see you this afternoon. Give my love to Frau von Ratenow."

She soon reached the grave she sought, and stood gazing at it; it was cold and mute,—only a grave, and that which lay beneath it was dead. There was no human being in the church-yard. A poor little redbreast sat on a head-stone and looked at her with round, curious eyes. This grave had never seemed so dreary to her as now; the devotional mood that always possessed her when she came hither was entirely absent to-day. "Why do I live? Why did they not lay me beside her here?" was the cry of her soul.

"You will catch cold, Fräulein," said the old sexton, who came hobbling along upon his clumsy wooden shoes with his hands in his pockets. "There's nothing to see here now; but it's beautiful in the spring when the blue crocuses that you planted come up."

She left the place and went into the town. Her peevish old father was still there, and he was ill,—she had forgotten this in these last wretched hours. She met Lieutenant Rost. He was quite startled by her pale, wan looks as she bowed in passing. He stopped for a moment and looked after the slender girlish figure, then walked on, whistling softly to himself,—a habit of his when anything affected him painfully.

"I'm so glad you are come, Elsie. Oh, your

papa! your papa!" old Barbara whispered to the girl in the hall. "There has been no doing anything with him since yesterday, when the postman brought him a big letter, and a little while ago the Bennewitzer sent to say he was coming, so now he's just raging."

Elsie entered the old man's room. He was sitting in an arm-chair at the window; his pipe lay upon the table, and he held a letter crushed up in his hands.

"So you have come at last, Elsie. I might waste away and die here; and it is all upon your account that I have worried so over this d—d affair."

She made no reply to his unjust reproach. "I will stay with you, papa, if you would like to have me," she said, after a pause.

"No! I will not have you. You know that will not do. But I must talk with you. You must know that there is no such thing as justice in the world; that they beggared me again yesterday, because—well, because I am I.—If the Bennewitzer were I, and I he, the bread of course would not fall always on the buttered side."

Elsie was silent; her head ached terribly, and she was utterly indifferent as to what might happen in the world.

"But the devil's in it if I consent to put up with it! I'll appeal to the Supreme Court of the Empire, if I starve! And what do you think," he went on,

bringing his clinched fist down upon the table, "that man, who has not a jot more right to the estate than I have, dares to offer me an alms, and sends to tell me he is coming to see me to-day! Could you have believed such insolence possible? Let him come; Barbara shall show him in. I am just in the mood to receive him."

Ah, how comfortless and wretched it was in the world!—in the world where wealth is the centre about which everything revolves, where the purest and noblest sentiments of the human heart must yield to considerations of the lowest and most sordid description! The girl turned sick with disgust with riches, with the power of money; her faith, her love, her ideals all lay trodden in the dust, and must she live on thus? She put up her hands to her temples when the old man began to scold again. "Don't, papa!" she entreated. "It is no matter at all; I do not want anything."

Then neither spoke. Elsie stood by the stove, looking around her at the smoky, cheerless room; outside, the water from the melting snow dripped monotonously into the gutter on the roof, and now and then some sound was heard in the street below. The house door was opened, and footsteps were audible coming up the stairs. She left the room.

"Stay below, I pray you, Herr von Hegebach," she said, leaning over the balustrade on the landing.

"Why? I wish to speak to my cousin."

- "Papa is so excited," was the rejoinder.
- "You look pale, Fräulein. Would it annoy you if I--"
 - "Papa is ill, I think," Elsie interposed.
 - "Can I speak with you, Fräulein?"
 - "With me? Oh, yes; but-"
 - "Where?" he asked.
 - "Indeed-I do not know-"

Barbara came to the rescue and opened a door. "It is comfortable enough here, and not too cold, Elsie."

The room which they entered was small; at one end of it were the old woman's store of apples, a chest painted all over with gaudy flowers, a clothes-press, two spinning-wheels, and a reel. The atmosphere was heavy with the odour of the fruit. The last pale rays of the early-dying day broke through the little window and illumined the refined face of the Bennewitzer Hegebach.

- "I came to speak again with your father. He is only giving himself unnecessary pain and expense, Fraulein Elsie; be sure that a renewal of his suit will result only in disaster for him, which I should deeply regret."
- "I have no influence with papa, Herr von Hegebach."
- "I am very sorry for it. But perhaps you can tell him that I am quite ready to hold to my former proposal."

"Papa will accept no gift of money," was the cold rejoinder.

"But why do you regard it in that light?" he asked, also growing colder. "I offer him only the interest of an amount of capital which I have no right to withdraw from the property."

"I understand nothing about it, Herr von Hege-bach."

"Nevertheless, you should approve my proposal to your father for his and for your sake, my dear cousin."

"For papa's sake? He wishes for nothing. And I?—— I thank you very much, but I need nothing."

"That is what girls of your age declare,—girls who do not yet know what it means to——"

"To have no money,—to be poor?" the girl interrupted him, all the bitterness that filled her soul rushing to her lips. "I know, Herr von Hegebach; the knowledge is soon gained in this life of ours. If God were just he would create no penniless girls, or, at least, he would bring them into the world with no hearts in their breasts."

Involuntarily he recoiled, and gazed at the lips that expressed such misery as they uttered these words.

"Why are you so bitter?" he asked, at last. "Other girls of your age would show their disappointment by tears."

"I have no cause for tears."

"I do not like to go away thus, Elsie von Hegebach," he began, after a pause. "It seems to me that I do wrong to leave you in this bitter mood. Promise me at least that you will ponder what I said just now. I offer no alms; you have a right to what I propose."

"I do not think that papa-"

"But you, yourself."

"I? Oh, I have passed my governess examinations." She spoke in the same bitter tone. It sounded almost disdainful.

"You have your father's obstinacy," he said, turning to go. "To whom shall I apply? Who has any influence with you?"

"I am afraid, Herr von Hegebach, that the person to whom you allude is not to be found."

"Adieu, Fräulein." She inclined her head slightly, and he went.

When the girl was alone she leaned her head against the whitewashed wall. A moan rang through the little room, and her slender frame trembled as if shaken by a tempest.

"Who was there?" her father asked, fretfully, as she re-entered his room.

"The Bennewitzer, papa."

"And you did not show him in to me?"

"I told him you were not well. He only wished to offer you that yearly income again."

"Let him go to the devil!" the old man burst

forth. "He gives the surest proof that he knows he is in the wrong."

"Shall I stay with you, papa? Will you have some tea?" she asked.

"No! I am going to bed. I do not feel well."

"Do let me stay here!"

In the twilight she had come close to him, and now her hands were upon his shoulder.

"What, Elsie! What do you want here?" The voice sounded nearly gentle.

"I often think that I belong to you, and you only, papa."

"Yes, yes! But then, child, I ought not to be a beggar."

"But even then, papa?"

He did not speak for a while; then he said, "You see, Elsie, the Bennewitzer has neither chick nor child, and if there was any justice to be had, you would inherit everything. But just because you are a girl—that contemptible will says expressly that girls are excluded from the inheritance."

She suddenly kneeled beside him, and laid her head upon his hand.

"And," he continued, "it worries me all the time that you are not a boy. Not on my account; no, on yours. Your mother moaned when she heard you were a girl. We had made up our minds that you were to be a boy. Her last words were, 'Oh, a girl! a poor little girl!' But so it is; you

"No, papa; and I cannot help being a poor girl," she said, simply, and two big tears dropped upon the old man's hand.

"Well, do not cry, child; only do not cry." He had grown nervous again. "You must go, Elsie; it is growing so dark."

She got up and looked for her hat and wrap. "Take a good sleep, papa; when I have time I will come again. I begin the children's lessons to-morrow."

Again she passed along the dark, dirty street. She was usually a little frightened thus late, but to-day it did not matter to her. The wind had risen, and moaned through the long avenue, and a fine rain penetrated her veil and cooled her cheeks and eyes.

She walked as slowly as if it were an evening in May. Suddenly a carriage turned out of the archway in the castle court-yard and rolled swiftly by her. It was the Bennewitzer's carriage. He had, of course, been paying a visit to Aunt Ratenow; perhaps trying to win her to his cause.

"' And all would be well if I only could die," a

voice cried within her. She must go into the house, and she would so gladly have run from it as far as her feet could carry her.

"Fräulein Elsie, you are to go directly to the old Frau von Ratenow," the servant told her in the hall. She gave him her hat and wrap, and went up-stairs.

Frau von Ratenow was sitting on the sofa; a decanter and two glasses stood on the table, and Elsie perceived the fragrance of a fine cigar in the room.

- "How is your father?" Aunt Ratenow said, motioning to the girl to sit down.
 - "Not very well, I think, aunt."
- "You look pale; that comes from dancing, Elsie."
 - "Yes, aunt."
- "Look; there comes our little white mouse," said the old lady, laughing, as her pretty little granddaughter, with much self-importance, came out into the room and up to Elsie.
- "From grandmamma, Cousin Elsie," she whispered; and, laying a little case in the girl's lap, she retired hastily to her hiding-place. Elsie found in the case a black enamel bracelet.
- "You are so kind, dear aunt!" she said, raising her beautiful brown eyes to the old face,—eyes that since the morning had been no longer those of a child; and she kissed the hand held out to her. "I will wear it as your gift."

"I wish you to do so, my child. And now go. The Bennewitzer left his remembrances for you."

In her own room she hastily threw aside the bracelet. She wanted no pity; she could not bear it. As if a caress and a trinket could cure her heartache and satisfy this terrible yearning! She wished to be alone; but then they would all think she was crying, and she would not shed a tear, not one.

But it would not do. She suddenly inhaled a delicious fragrance,—a fragrance that had intoxicated her yesterday. These were her violets,—his violets, and they seemed to say, with his voice, 'Happiness,—is not this moment happiness?' She suddenly sobbed aloud,—it sounded like a cry of pain,—and the next moment the door of her room opened, and Aunt Lott clasped the trembling girl in her arms.

Aunt Lott knew everything: she might see that her heart was broken, quite broken.

CHAPTER IX.

SCHEMES.

About two weeks had passed by, when one morning Aunt Lott went down-stairs and asked for Moritz. He was in madame's morning-room, one of the servants said; and the old lady traversed the blue drawing-room, and, pausing at the portière, called, "Do I disturb you, children?"

"Come in, Aunt Lott," Moritz made answer.

Frieda was sitting at her writing-table. "In one minute, aunt," she said, and read over the note she had just been writing upon a delicate cream-tinted sheet adorned with a crest and monogram:

"My dearest Lili,—Just a few hurried words to you, that you may be perfectly au fait with regard to my ball-dress for Berlin, since we shall inevitably often stand beside each other. I ordered of Gerson a gown of white satin embroidered in silver, the corsage of drap d'argent, and I shall wear my diamonds with it, instead of flowers. I think it will look distinguished. Mamma and Moritz insist that Elsie, who has lately grown

worse than tiresome (à cause de Monsieur Bernardi), shall go with us. Mamma is going to attire her in pink silk. For my part, I am about worn out with this Elizabeth cultus, and mean to express my sentiments plainly to Moritz. Let me entreat you, Lili, never upon any account to take into your house a young girl who belongs, as it were, to the family. It is quite intolerable, especially when the head of the family feels it his bounden duty to play paternal Providence and devoted knight on her behalf, as does Moritz. My patience will not hold out much longer. Love to our father and mother.

" A bientôt.

"Your sister,
"Frieda."

"N.B.—The Bennewitzer is here continually. I do not trust my mother-in-law on this point. She says it is on account of Elsie's father. There is an old proverb, which I will not commit to paper.—F."

"There! Now, dear aunt, what is the matter?" she asked, after having sealed and addressed her letter. As she spoke, she crossed the room to an exquisite little cabinet, pulled out various drawers, and prepared to look over her manifold articles of jewelry. She had on a light-blue dressing-gown, and upon her luxuriant black hair she wore a rosette of lace with blue ribbons.

"Good heavens!" Aunt Lott began, turning to Moritz, who had been sitting motionless near the fire in his gray shooting-jacket and high boots, as he had come in from the fields,—"good heavens, Moritz! I am breaking my heart about Elsie! She does not complain, she says nothing, but she sleeps not at all; she eats nothing, and she is growing so thin. Will you not send the doctor up, if he comes to-day? I am afraid she is fretting herself ill about this Bernardi."

"Is that farce not ended yet?" asked the young wife. "What would you have? Elsie seems entirely contented. It is very natural that she should be a little shy about going out, since she was the town-talk here for a week."

"Yes, she keeps away from everybody, Frieda," said the old lady, nodding her head gravely; "but——"

"Well, you are doing everything imaginable to console her," Frieda continued, impatiently tossing a costly gem into a drawer with no gentle hand. "No one asks any longer whether I am pleased; no one but Elsie is thought of. It is just so with mamma, it is just so with the children, it is just so with Moritz. There is no use in my saying what I like, or how I like it, and I shall soon sit at table entirely mute."

Aunt Lott looked in positive terror at Moritz, leaning back negligently in his arm-chair.

"You see, aunt, Frieda knows how becoming a pout is to her. But really, child, you must not disgrace me by taking your ill humour with you to Berlin, for——"

"If you insist upon Elsie's accompanying us, I, with my ill humour, shall stay here," she interrupted him.

"You must settle that with my mother," he calmly replied; "it is by her desire that Elsie goes with us."

"Then I cannot go, on account of leaving the children," Frieda insisted. "I cannot see why I have a governess if I cannot leave the house without anxiety."

"Hitherto your nurse has been sufficient to relieve you of all such. But as you please, Frieda. I have never yet quarrelled with you, as you know, when you have seen fit to be obstinate. This is the last day of Elsie's duties as a governess. Before the end of an hour I shall have taken steps to engage some one else to fill her position."

Frieda was silent, and went on slowly closing and locking one drawer after another.

"One favour I must request of you, Frieda," he began again. "Do not let the girl suspect the reason for this arrangement. All else will adjust itself." He rose, took his cap and riding-whip from a chair, and left the room. In an instant the

young wife buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. "Oh, Aunt Lott, I am so terribly unhappy!"

The good old lady looked on helplessly at this scene. "Good gracious, Frieda, what is the matter with you?"

"He does not love me any longer!" the pretty creature sobbed, throwing herself into the nearest arm-chair. "It is but too clear to me that he loves me no longer."

"Heavens! you are not jeal——?" Aunt Lott, in her dismay, positively could not pronounce the rest of the word.

"And now he is going to mamma,—to mamma, who always treats me like a silly child!"

She suddenly started; the blue curtains parted, and Frau von Ratenow in all her dignity appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"Well, Frieda, I have just heard from Moritz that you are not well," she began, sitting down beside her weeping daughter-in-law.

Frieda stammered something about headache.

"Of course!" The old Frau took her hand. "The children are too much for you all day long; I know that. Nerves are the fashion nowadays. Let me propose a plan to you. Send the little girls to school. There will be the peace of heaven in the house, my dear little daughter, and you need vex yourself no longer about a governess. Hey?"

Frieda started up from her reclining position, but she made no reply.

"Elsie Hegebach will remain here, dear child, as my companion," the old lady went on, in a louder voice; "and as such I shall know how to shield her from all unkindness, Frieda."

Frieda had changed colour. "I did not mean that," she said, weeping afresh.

"Where is Elsie?" asked her mother-in-law.

"In the nursery; she is just giving the children an arithmetic-lesson," was the low reply.

"I hope you will take tea with me in my room tonight," Frau von Ratenow continued. "Aunt Lott, pray be punctual. The Bennewitzer is coming."

"For the third time in the last two weeks," Frieda observed, as she arose. "He never used to come at all,—or only very rarely."

"True; he had an invalid wife for years, and he is still in mourning. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you this evening?" she asked again.

"I am so sorry, mamma dear,—we are engaged to take tea with Frau Z."

"Is Elsie going, too?"

"She was asked, but declined."

"I hope she will not refuse to come to me." And the old lady nodded most kindly to her daughterin-law. "Adieu, my dear child. Send the children over, if they would like to come."

"There, aunt, you see. That is just the way

mamma always behaves," the young wife wailed. "Every human being would say I was right. If Elsie has undertaken to teach the children, she ought to go through with it. I am the last to require anything unreasonable of her. It is no wonder that my patience does not hold out. So soon as I think that the little girls are really learning, Moritz comes and says, 'Elsie, we are going to the great subscription ball in Berlin. My mother wants to buy you a dress,' and then what becomes of diligence and earnestness?"

"I do not think that Elsie wished to go to Berlin," the old lady said, in defence of her darling. She was obliged, however, to listen to a long lamentation and complaint. Frieda was the object of bitter persecution. She really almost succeeded in making good her words, and sat at the dinnertable without opening her lips to speak.

Thus the storm which had long been threatening in the heavens of Moritz's domestic happiness had come at last. The atmosphere within-doors was oppressive, in spite of the clear, cold weather outside. Elsie did not observe it; she had a little girl on each side of her, and was abundantly occupied in answering their questions. Moritz had at first objected to having the children at table; but Elsie had thought it best, and he had yielded, to the wild delight of the little ones.

Yes, she did indeed look wretched, and she

was very quiet,—the result of the struggle with a proud, wounded heart, and the perpetual query, 'Wherefore I?' This caused sleepless nights and a sickening longing for vanished golden days. She seemed to herself a pariah among the rest, forsaken and outcast, and only because—she was poor! She could not even weep with her brown eyes, as in the song. Ah, yes, there was still much in the world to make life desirable; hundreds and hundreds shared her lot, and grew to be calm and contented with hard work and—no happiness. But they had all trodden a thorny path to gain content. A young heart, sick with longing for happiness, cannot be soothed to the sleep of oblivion in a few days. It takes years for that,—long years!

In the evening old Frau von Ratenow's drawingroom was the most attractive spot in the house. The
fire in the porcelain stove crackled and hissed and
hummed in every key. The heavy curtains were
drawn before the windows, excluding all draughts.
The light of the lamp was reflected in silver and
glass upon the snowy damask table-cloth, and
Aunt Lott and the mistress of the room were seated
upon the sofa, the latter with her knitting. Elsie,
busied with some fine needle-work, sat beside the
small table upon which the silver kettle was boiling; she wore a dark stuff dress, and a small, delicately-embroidered apron. The Bennewitzer was
expected.

For Elsie these hours with the old gentleman were almost intolerable, she was a prey to such mingled emotions. Since her father had lately spoken his first kind words to her, her heart had been aglow with love for the fretful old man. knew that he was not conducting himself as he should towards his cousin, but he had said that he was acting thus for her sake, and that atoned for everything in the girl's eyes,-for his moods, his obstinacy, his want of interest in her. He had since been as reserved with her as before, but she had been allowed one glimpse into his embittered soul, and no word of his was now too hard, no mood of his too gloomy; the dross of misery and loneliness obscured the gold in his heart; he was her father, the only human being upon whom she had a claim, a sacred claim.

Therefore the Bennewitzer troubled her. True, he had not hitherto spoken of her father during his visits to the castle, but nevertheless she knew what he thought of him, and what Aunt Ratenow thought of him, and it pained her unutterably. Besides, Aunt Ratenow was so loud in her praises of the Bennewitzer. Aunt Ratenow's likings and dislikings were always so emphatically expressed, and it was not permitted to object to them, or the old lady's voice grew very loud. "Good or bad; there's no happy medium," she was wont to say. It was not her nature either to think or to act by halves.

Bernardi's name had never again passed her lips; the affair was at an end, now and forever,—the less it was spoken of the better. A wound must bleed itself out, she thought, but it could do so in silence, without letting any one see it.

"Elsie," she began in her deep voice, pushing up her spectacles and dropping her newspaper, "you may read that aloud to me; my eyes grow worse daily. I do not know, Lott, how you have managed to preserve yours, with your perpetual reading. It is a positive comfort, Elsie, that Moritz yielded to my request and relieved you of the instruction of the children. I really cannot read the morning paper, nor can I write a letter without filling it with regular pot-hooks."

Elsie took the paper. "If I could only feel assured, dear aunt, that Moritz and Frieda were not dissatisfied with my teaching."

"Aha! fishing for compliments, child!" the old lady rejoined. "No, no; Moritz yielded to my request. There's no knowing what we may come to when our eyes begin to fail us. There comes the Bennewitzer," she interrupted herself hastily, as a carriage was heard to drive into the court-yard. It drew up before the hall door, and immediately steps were heard upon the stairs, and their visitor appeared. Aunt Ratenow arose with a certain air of solemnity. "Good-evening, my dear Hegebach. I am glad you have come to

make the time pass pleasantly for three lonely women."

He chivalrously kissed the offered hand, and bowed to Aunt Lott and Elsie. To the latter he handed a small parcel in silver paper. "The last in the greenhouse," he said, kindly. It was a magnificent Marshal Niel, drooping its exquisite head upon its slender green stalk.

"Thank you very much, Herr von Hegebach."

She put the rose in a vase of water, and busied herself with making the tea.

- "Is there any news, my dear Hegebach?" Frau von Ratenow asked, and in a moment they were fairly launched in conversation. They both knew the country far and wide, and from the present they drifted into talk of old times.
- "Excuse me, my dear Hegebach, I am ten years older than you,—just as old as your cousin; I know exactly."
- "No, you are mistaken, madame," he quietly rejoined. "You are at most only eight years older. I was thirty-six when I married, and that was eighteen years ago. Remember, my eldest boy was in the fifth form at school."
 - "True. How time flies, Hegebach!"
- "Indeed it does. Elsie will be nineteen in the spring," Aunt Lott added.
 - "But still there are others older than we,

Hegebach; you are yet a young man," Frau von Ratenow remarked.

Aunt Lott glanced at him; he was handsome and dignified, and he had a benevolent air,—but young? She herself was but a very few years older, and it was long since she had been young. "Men certainly have too much the advantage of us," she thought.

Elsie sat by in silence; her thoughts were elsewhere. What interest had these old times for her? They lay so far, far back, in a mouldering past. She began to be possessed by a nervous spirit of unrest which often attacked her now. She wished she could go up-stairs to her little room and sit at the window and dream,—it was such weary work to resist yielding to the thoughts that filled her soul, and to force herself to listen, to answer.

"How is your father?" the Bennewitzer asked, leaning across the arm of his chair towards Elsie.

"Thank you,—pretty well at present," she replied.

"And no more kindly disposed?" He spoke in a low voice, and his dark eyes sought hers with a pleading expression in them.

She blushed. "Papa does not change his mind so easily," she said, bluntly.

Frau von Ratenow's face grew dark. "Elsie, pray let us have our tea. Where is Johann?"

The young girl arose, and glided noiselessly

across the room to the antechamber. Herr von Hegebach's eyes followed her, as with one white, shapely hand he stroked his full beard. Frau von Ratenow changed the subject, as if hoping to make him forget the girl's curt reply. When Elsie returned, conversation was brisk again.

Herr von Hegebach was a delightful companion; he had travelled much, and had known many distinguished people. He talked of Lapland and of Lebanon; he had tasted the cream of existence, had sketched and sauntered by the Nile, and had gazed upon Niagara. He knew life, knew it on its most agreeable side. And down in the old house in the narrow street sat a lonely old man, who had not even had money enough to enable him to visit the baths that might have soothed his suffering. The price paid by his cousin in Cairo for a single jewelled dagger might have enabled him to stay for weeks in Töplitz.

These were the bitter, angry thoughts that besieged the brain behind Elsie's white forehead. All in which she had hitherto put faith,—love, constancy, magnanimity, were ridiculous, antiquated notions. In the world of to-day there was but one thing that could bestow happiness, but one thing that could endow with power, and that was money, wealth.

"To our speedy friendship, my dear cousin." The Bennewitzer held up his glass; she lightly clinked her own against it.

"Look at me," he said, gravely.

Again her face flushed crimson; she was vexed with herself, but his eyes confused her.

"Stay here a moment, Elsie," Frau von Ratenow called, when towards eleven o'clock the Bennewitzer had taken his leave, after having extorted a promise that the ladies would soon pay him a visit at Bennewitz.

Elsie came back into the room and sat down; Aunt Lott had excused herself upon the stroke of ten.

Frau von Ratenow looked vexed, and did not know where or how to begin. "You treat the Bennewitzer very oddly, my dear child," she said, at last. "It is ridiculous to hold him responsible for your father's mistakes. At least you might maintain a neutral position in the affair."

"I know that Herr von Hegebach's rights are indisputable, aunt," Elsie replied, looking the old lady full in the face. "I do not grudge them to him,—it would be folly."

"That's right; but why are you so distant towards him?"

"Forgive me, aunt," she stammered.

Frau von Ratenow arose, and held out her hand. "I do not know that you are different from other girls; you do not usually fail to comprehend. Good-night, Elsie."

Like some hunted thing the girl flew up-stairs to

her room. No, it was impossible,—her aunt could not have meant the terrible thing that had just occurred to her. But what else had she meant? She suddenly laughed, but it was an almost scornful laugh, and sounded strange in her own ears. Then she stood before her mirror and looked at her pale face. It was indeed ridiculous; only the most excited fancy could have suggested such folly. No, her aunt had not meant anything especial; it was only her usual way of speaking, of course.

"Aunt Lott!" she called, gently. She seemed to fear her own thoughts, and she entered Aunt Lott's prim, neat bedroom.

"What is it, my darling?" was the reply, in a sleepy tone.

"I am so worried, aunt."

In a moment Aunt Lott sat upright in bed, quite awake. "I was reminded of your mother, child, this evening," she began. "Just so we were sitting in Cousin Ratenow's drawing-room when your father proposed to her. You look so terribly like her, Elsie, and there is something about the Bennewitzer that resembles your father,—his voice, and the way in which he uses his hands when he strokes his beard, you know; and he used to be just as gentle."

The girl stood mute; an indescribable dread seemed to stifle the words upon her lips.

"It was nearly twenty years ago, Elsie, and it

seems like to-day," the old lady went on, in a tone of wailing complaint; "only Cousin Ratenow is much stouter, and my hair is grown quite white. But how vivid the past is sometimes! Lieschen, your mother used to come just so to my bedside, and once, I remember, she too said, 'Lott dear, Lott dear, I am so uneasy.'"

"Dear aunt, please,—I am afraid!" The slender girlish figure, standing close beside the bed, shivered with a nervous chill.

"You are not well, Elsie."

"No; I think I am going to be ill, aunt."

"Poor child! that comes from grieving."

"I do not grieve, aunt."

"I know, I know, child; but you cannot help it. When the doctor comes to-morrow, he must give you something to make you sleep. I told Moritz so to-day. Do you think I do not know how you read far into the night? I hear you every time you turn a leaf. Good-night, darling; go to sleep. I used to be able to sit up late, but now——"

CHAPTER X.

USELESS STRUGGLES.

Weeks passed, and spring was at hand. A disagreeable east wind had been blowing for days beneath clear skies, and the golden sunshine lured people from their houses to walk abroad, when the bitter air chilled them so cruelly that they returned to their warm rooms again, pitying the flowers that had ventured forth thus early. But at last the fragrant, warm, moist breeze of spring was abroad; clouds and sunshine alternated in the sky; the buds burst forth everywhere; the grass in the castle garden was sprinkled thick with violets; and upon the grave which belonged to Elsie, in the church-yard, the blue crocuses were blooming.

She had just hung a wreath upon the cross above this grave; it was the anniversary of her mother's death and her own birthday, so closely had her existence been linked to death. She sat for a long while upon the grave, mechanically arranging the leaves of the wreath with her hands, while her gaze strayed far beyond the crosses and stones about her over the distant landscape.

Her life had become at last a mute struggle with

herself and with all around her. There was none in whom she could put her trust. All had combined against her, even Moritz. She felt that Moritz was dissatisfied with her,—he positively avoided her; and Frieda was so cold and heartless.

"She never had a trial in her life," said Aunt Ratenow. "She is a spoiled child, and one must not attach much importance to her words. Grown people are not offended by the rudeness of a child."

As for Aunt Lott, she had suddenly departed for her nunnery. She had come up to her room one day from an interview with Cousin Ratenow with her eyes red with weeping, and had packed her trunk. Her stern cousin had, in fact, said that it would be much better this year that Lott should stay at home in the summer and spend her eight weeks in the nunnery this spring. Yes, and what Aunt Ratenow said must be done.

Frieda had with her at present her sister Lili, a lively little brunette, not so pretty as the young wife, but she could laugh very merrily, and knew even better than Frieda how to turn the house upside down.

Frau von Ratenow declared that she was a fashionable feather-head, and that she ought to get up an intimacy with Annie Cramm, they would make so excellent a team. But, in spite of the many engagements which the ladies had every day, Fräu-

lein Lili always contrived to take tea with 'dear darling' Frau von Ratenow. She doted upon old ladies and gentlemen; she was far too fond of them, for she never could fall in love with a man if he were young. Men about fifty she liked best of all, it was so interesting to be a young wife with an old husband. She expressed her views on the subject so drolly that even Frau von Ratenow could not help laughing.

"He must have money, though, Lili; hey, child?"

"Of course, dearest Frau Ratenow,—either a great deal of money, or he must be Your Excellency, or at least General-in-Chief, or something of the kind."

And the Bennewitzer came so very often, and Aunt Ratenow was more delighted with him than ever. 'Elsie, he is a noble character.' And Frieda always had a sweet smile for him, and Lili raised her eyelids with their long lashes so slowly and languidly when she talked with him. There was quite a commotion when his carriage with its spirited horses drove into the court-yard. Aunt Ratenow went in all her dignity almost to her drawing-room door to meet him. Frieda, with Lili, met him more often than not upon the staircase,—Herr von Hegebach was seriously embarrassed to decide whether he should go into Frieda's luxurious boudoir or to Aunt Ratenow's sacred

apartment; and whithersoever he turned his footsteps all were usually ready to follow him.

And Elsie apparently stood quite outside of this circle, although she could not but feel that she was thrust more and more into the centre of it. She tried again and again to recover a single inch of the ground that she was forced to lose. Unconsciously, again and again she would look into her aunt's determined face with eyes full of a piteous entreaty; again and again her young heart would recoil, like that of a terrified child, from the gaze of two dark eyes,—and still she lost one foot after another of ground.

To-day a gorgeous bouquet had found a place among her birthday-gifts in Aunt Ratenow's room, and a large visiting-card attached to it proclaimed the giver. A letter had come, too, from Aunt Lott, dear Aunt Lott. Moritz had pressed her hand and had given her a charming Russia-leather writing-case, while the children clung about her with shouts of joy. Lili and Frieda had also come to greet her, the latter with various sashes, cravats, and other 'tackle,' as Aunt Ratenow called it, and one pale-blue sash the old lady handed back to the giver, remarking that it must have got among the rest by mistake, as the pin-marks in it showed that it had been worn.

And oh, Elsie was so tired! What did she care though Frieda should palm off upon her all her

old ribbons? She was a penniless girl. Why should she not wear cast-off sashes? She had no money for this 'sweet nonsense of existence,' as Moritz called the costly trifles of his beautiful wife. It was, after all, quite natural. Frieda meant no harm. Ah, if this were all that was asked of her!

Aunt Ratenow had told her, early in the morning, about the day of her birth, and of how sad it had all been,—of how, since that time, her father had been a melancholy, gloomy man, and that she had told him that, some day, the child would be a blessing to him, a great blessing. "And this is in your power, Elsie," she had added.

The young girl in the quiet graveyard suddenly arose; the wretched icy sensation had come over her again. She hurriedly walked along the narrow pathway; she did not see the golden sunlight sparkling in the tiny drops that trembled upon the young leaves. Spring was everywhere, and everywhere were tender green and the twittering of merry birds; even the old tower of the gateway had twined a feathery wreath about its reverend head.

Her cheeks glowed feverishly when she entered her father's room. She longed to turn to him; he hated the Bennewitzer. He would let her take refuge with him if—— The old man had opened both his windows, the newspaper lay before him on the table, and a wineglass stood beside his empty pipe. "Papa, do you not feel well?" Elsie asked.

"Oh, yes, child. Only this breathing,—the cough—— It is better now. You can close the windows. I cannot bear any agitation, and this day!" He held out his hand to her, and kept hers firmly clasped for a minute.

"Draw the curtains,—the sun is dazzling, Elsie; and then—perhaps you may like it—that little box your mother always kept upon her work-table, and in it are all the little caps and sacques that she made for you. I have always kept it, Elsie. You may take it, child. You see it was so pleasant when she sat there; it was a ray of light in my life. It all comes back to me to-day. Once, when she had been out,—it was about Christmas-time,—she said afterwards, as she sat at her work-table, and there was a merry glance in her brown eyes, 'Wilhelm, I saw such a beautiful rocking-horse to-day at Lehman's——' Ah, Elsie, if I could have bought you a rocking-horse, it would all have been different!"

The girl bowed her head. Still the same old song.

"And now, child,"—he pushed towards her the rosewood box with the plain silver plate on the lid, on which were engraved her dead mother's initials,—"now I have given up my hatred of the Bennewitzer."

"Papa!" it sounded like a scream of terror.

"Yes, child. Ought I not to do so? You have often told me how wrong it was."

"Yes, papa; forgive me." She spoke as if in despair.

"And he wishes to be reconciled with me, Elsie; it was to be a surprise for you, child. They wish to send the carriage for me to-day that we may dine together at the castle, but I—I do not know whether it will do, Elsie. I cannot bear any excitement now; and you see it is an old dislike, and it is not so easy to overcome. I know that I must do it for your sake, but——"

"Papa! For the love of Heaven not for my sake!" the girl entreated, pale to the very lips. "Who told you this?"

"Frau Ratenow, child; and she is right, she is right."

Elsie sprang up from her seat and tried to speak.

"Do not be angry, Elsie, that I have betrayed the secret. You see, child, it is a terrible thought for a father that he must leave his child alone in the world with no one and nothing."

"Dear, dear papa,"—she laid her pale face against his cheek,—"I am not afraid, not at all. You are alive, and you will live a long time, and you will let me stay with you. I came to beg this of you, papa."

"Do not agitate me, Elsie. This has all come so

suddenly, and old Barbara is so cross and so loud, I---"

Suddenly he groaned and pressed his hand upon his breast. "These miserable pains. It is well that all turns out so for you, Elsie. You do not know how terribly lonely and cold life can be, or you would not be so brave. For you the skies rain roses."

She was mute, 'forgot to marble.' She only knew that there was no one now who understood her. At this moment old Barbara rushed in in extreme agitation. The mistress from the castle and the Bennewitzer Herr were coming up-stairs.

"Already?" The old man changed colour. "Go into the next room, Elsie; you need not see how——"

She passed through the low door-way into her mother's room, and suddenly confronted Frau von Ratenow.

"We came here, Elsie—at home the very walls have ears at present. Lili is everywhere and nowhere, and she need not hear everything. I do not know how that will-o'-the-wisp contrives to put herself forever in Hegebach's way. It seems to be the fashion now for the girls to pay court to the men." And she sat down in her heavy black silk mantilla by the window and loosened her bonnetstrings. "Good heavens! I believe Barbara has a fire!"

Yes, the air here was stifling, the pale girl

thought, as she fairly struggled for breath. From the next room came the full sonorous voice of the Bennewitzer, and the old lady sat here idly drumming upon the window-seat with her large, well-shaped hand. Her face beamed with exceeding content. "Look, Elsie," she said, "there in the corner of that sofa you lay nineteen years ago and screamed most piteously. Yes, if we could know beforehand all that is going to happen I need not have had such a heavy heart when I took you up in my arms."

"What do you mean, aunt?"

"Yes, my girl, the world is a strange place, and the Father of us all works His will in a strange zigzag fashion sometimes, but it all comes right in the end. What do I mean? Come, come, Elsie; you are no goose of a girl to pretend ignorance. I know that your question is nonsense, because you know the answer to it perfectly. And, with the clear good sense God has given you, you cannot but say, 'Thank God that all has turned out thus! My old Aunt Ratenow was always good and kind to me, but it is quite a different thing to have a home of one's own, where there is no need for constantly adapting one's self to the whims and wants of others. Life at the castle was but a makeshift for me after all. And my poor old father, too, can now have some happy days free from care.' Am I not right, dear child?"

"Oh, aunt, please, please!" the girl moaned.

"And then, child, he is so kind, so thoroughly kind; indeed, he is a delightful person. I confess to you, Elsie, that when I heard that he had lost his sons-you were still at school at the time-I said to myself, 'He certainly will marry again now;' and then I thought that it would be a special providence if he should take a fancy to you. I did indeed rejoice when I saw it all happening as I wished, little by little; and now there he is in that room. Elsie, asking your father's consent. Come here, Elsie, close to me. Let me ask you, in your ear, if you imagine I did not know all about that nonsense with the handsome young lieutenant? Ah! my girl, I have been young myself! Lieutenants, child, make admirable partners in a dance for girls like you; but there's something more needed for marriage than a pair of sparkling eyes and two gilt epaulettes. But, Elsie, how like a statue you look! Oh, child, child, what is this?"

The girl had sunk on her knees, and raised her clasped hands in entreaty.

"Aunt, aunt, have mercy!" she sobbed, with tearless eyes. "I will do everything,—I will—I will—ah, I cannot!"

"Great heavens!" The old Frau caught the girl around the waist and raised her up. "Elsie, control yourself. This is no time for silly, girlish whims. Take care, child, how you say 'I cannot.' There

are grave, terribly grave duties to be fulfilled in the world, which cannot be looked at through a coloured glass. The welfare of a long, long life is at stake. The question is not of tripping through a bed of roses, but of taking a serious step with an honest desire to do what is right. Ah, my child, what would have become of me if I had not had a sensible father? Do you think I should have chosen Friedrich von Ratenow for a husband? No, Elsie; I was head over ears in love with a poor wretch of a Candidate who was my brother's tutor. I was a saucy girl, Elsie, and when Ratenow came to woo me I told my father this. Heavens, child, you should have seen him! Before I could look round, the Candidate was out of the house, and I had Ratenow's ring on my finger; and I never repented it. What does it matter? Even a princess cannot do otherwise. Come, come, Elsie; now you are going to be reasonable."

She stroked the fair head that lay motionless on her breast.

"Hey, my child? you are reasonable now."

"Not now, aunt. Give me time, I entreat," the trembling girl implored. "I must first be more composed. You must give me time,—you must!"

She spoke with a degree of passion that convinced Frau von Ratenow that nothing was to be accomplished by urging the girl further at present.

"Take my advice, child, and go out in the open

air for a while. There is time for a walk before dinner." She went into the next room, and brought Elsie her hat and wrap. "There, my dear, and God guide you!"

The poor child fairly ran out of the house. Here, at least, she was beneath the open sky; before her lay a wide expanse of country, hope was not yet dead within her, and she felt young and strong enough to defend herself against a world. She thought of the quiet village in Thuringia where she had been at school; of the pretty church, and of the people who lived so thoroughly at peace among themselves; she saw distinctly before her Sister Beata's kind face beneath the little Moravian cap. Ah, there was one spot at least where the tempests of life never raged.

She was at home again before she knew it, and was glad to hear from the servant that madame and Fräulein Lili had gone out. As she was going upstairs, she turned suddenly and asked, "Where is the Herr Baron?"

"In his library, Fräulein Elsie."

She descended the stairs again, and knocked at a door.

- "Come in."
- "Moritz, it is I. May I come?"
- "Why, my dear Elsie, of course."
- "I want to ask you something, Moritz."
- "Certainly, Elsie. Let us go into the garden."

She looked at him in amazement, he was so constrained, almost embarrassed.

"As you please, Moritz."

They went through the garden-room, and sauntered up and down the broad path outside. The air was wonderfully sweet with violets, and the birds were chirping melodiously. It was a rarely delicious spot, this quaint old garden of the castle.

Elsie suddenly shaded her eyes with her simple little fan. "Moritz," she began, "have I offended you?"

- "Oh, no, my dear, good child," he answered, tenderly.
- "I thought I had; you have seemed different to me of late."

He looked at her as she walked beside him with downcast eyes. What had become of the fresh, blooming girl?

- "Moritz!"—it was the old childlike tone,—
 "must I do what they all want me to? Must I?"
- "Must you? No, Elsie; but it might be well if you would."
 - "I cannot, Moritz."
- "Elsie——" He paused, stood still, and took her hand. "Do not think of Bernardi any more," he said, in his old kind cordial way; "do not wait for him. You see, we men forget. You must not suppose that he frets as you do, little one. You know nothing of life as yet, Elsie."

She looked up at him with melancholy eyes, and a delicate flush suffused her pale cheek. "I think very often of him, Moritz. I do so without any will of my own. I know too well that there is a gulf, a wide gulf, between us. I only mean now whether I—but perhaps you do not understand me, Moritz. I do not love my cousin in the least; not in the least as one should love him—who——"

She stammered, stopped short, and stood before him, bathed in blushes, while large tears rolled down her cheeks from beneath her drooping eyelashes.

He did indeed understand, but what could he do? What was to become of her? He could not even offer her an asylum if she refused the Bennewitzer. His mother would be very angry with her;—and Frieda?— His domestic happiness was at stake; ridiculous as it seemed, his little wife was jealous, absolutely and positively, and she showed that she was so upon every occasion. Elsie, pure-hearted child that she was, did not dream of it, and she must know nothing of it.

She was silent. "Elsie," he said, at last, and he felt how cruelly commonplace were his words,—"Elsie, do not make life so terribly hard for yourself; you see"—and he slowly walked on again, his hands clasped behind him—"we grow older and calmer, and as we do so our views change entirely with regard to affairs of the heart, and

marriages of inclination—yes—what was I going to say?—Elsie, child, if I were you I would take all this into consideration."

She made no reply at first, and dried her tears. "Well, then, Moritz, let me at least ask one favour of you. Beg Aunt Ratenow not to ask me to decide to-day,—not to-day. And, Moritz, forgive me for troubling you."

She turned and went back to the house, passing through the hall; she had heard Frieda's voice in the garden-room, and the notes of a waltz echoed upon her ear. Lili, as was her fashion, played a couple of bars and then turned to something else. At last she sat down in her own room. She had no one to turn to: she was quite alone. All were angry with her because she rejected an assured future, a comfortable existence, the enviable position of a wealthy young wife, for the sake of that which was ridiculous in the eyes of the world, but sacred to a pure womanly heart. "But then her father! her lonely old father!" cried a voice within her, the only one that combated her convictions. Her pale cheeks burned hot with shame. "No," she said, half aloud, "I do not love him; I betray him and myself too." She did not know the outside world with its thorny paths which a solitary, penniless girl must tread, but it could not be so horrible as if she should --- She sprang up, trembling with a nervous chill; then, picking up a

book, she turned over the leaves hurriedly and aimlessly. Some verses caught her eye:

"The mother said, 'Why, Elsie dear,
Your choice thus long delaying?
Love comes to those united here,
Custom and wont obeying;
And many a girl accepting fate
Finds Paradise in waiting,
And Love an unexpected mate,
Though absent in the mating.'"

She smiled sadly, and closed the book, then bowed her head upon her clasped hands and cried, for the first time for years, like a child,—a poor, forsaken child. Hours passed, and the spring twilight wove its misty web among the budding branches of the trees outside, and the moon cast its pale rays into the girl's room, and still she sat with bent head and folded hands.

CHAPTER XI.

BETROTHED.

Music floated up from the drawing-room. Fräulein Lili was playing the piano to pass the time. The others were staying so terribly long in Aunt Ratenow's room, where the old lady had in her most courteous manner signified that Fräulein Lili's presence was not at present desirable. was a very stupid, tiresome day. The dinner with the Bennewitzer had bored her,-he hardly spoke a word, and kept stroking his dark beard after his well-known fashion; and before that there had been a domestic scene at the Cramms', where she had been to make a call. There sat Annie, newly betrothed, as stiff as a jointed doll, and at her side stood Lieutenant von Rost, with an air of supreme indifference, as if he had no interest whatever in the affair. Mamma Cramm was the only one who showed any genuine emotion, for the father's mood seemed rather the result of various long-necked bottles in the wine-cooler than that of delight in his future son-in-law. Of course, after her first surprise was over, Lili had excused her intrusion and had taken her leave, having, however, 162

obtained permission to spread the news of the joyful event.

When Annie accompanied her out into the hall, she asked, in true military fashion, "Annie, when did the bomb burst? When was the strategy first carried into effect? There has been no talk of such a thing until now." And Annie blushed.

"Oh, it is quite a long attachment, but papa would not give his consent."

"How cruel!" Lili bit her lip to control her laughter. "And now?"

"Ah, Lili, I should have died without him."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lili. "Well, then, I'll not keep you another moment. But, Annie, tell me one thing,—his name is von Rost, is it not?"

"Yes, von Rost." The tone was rather curt.

"Adieu, Annie." And, suppressing a giggle, Lili ran off to tell the news at dinner; but there everybody seemed out of humour, and no one except Frieda deigned to be at all interested in her intelligence.

After dinner the Bennewitzer had taken his departure; the sisters had gone to the window to look after his elegant equipage, and Lili had yawned terribly, and then hummed a couple of bars from 'Der Freischütz:' "Old as he is, he'll do for me. His many wrinkles I don't see," and ended with, "Ugh! Frieda, I think I shall go home soon."

"Yes, I don't wonder you want to go."

The young wife seemed vexed, and buried herself in a volume of Heyse's novels. Moritz was in his mother's room, and at last Frieda arose, saying, "Lili, something is wrong over there; I must go and see what it is." And she had been gone forever, and Lili was more and more bored. Even that pale Elsie did not appear, to take pity upon her.

It really would be best to go home. There she could at least amuse herself with the hunting page of the D—— court. He certainly was less tiresome than the Bennewitzer. Pshaw! what was to be done with such heroes as the Bennewitzer and Moritz,—big, good-humoured bear that the latter was? The idea of Frieda's being jealous of any one with him! Merciful heavens!

The young wife had first listened a few moments at the door of her mother-in-law's apartments, and then had gone in.

Frau von Ratenow sat calmly, as usual, in her windowed recess, her particular cup with the coat of arms on the table beside her, as was the custom every afternoon, and her knitting in her hands. Moritz was pacing the room to and fro in long strides. He looked much agitated.

"Ah!" exclaimed the pretty little woman, "Moritz is playing the caged lion. What has happened?"

"I do not quite agree with my mother, Frieda."

"Indeed!" with some irony. "That certainly is very unusual."

"I maintain," Frau von Ratenow declared, "that we must keep a tight rein; there are certain people who would thrust good fortune from them as a sick child thrusts from him the physic which is to cure him."

"And I maintain, mother, that no woman should be sold nowadays, and in Germany," he burst forth, his honest face aglow with indignation. "She should be absolutely free in this respect,—should have the right to bestow herself or to refuse herself. What will become of good principles, of morality, or of true womanliness, should such sentiments as we hear too much of at the present time ever become the order of the day? For my part, I hold that girl degraded who marries only for a support." He confronted his mother with flashing eyes.

The old lady maintained a perfect composure. Moritz had always been something of an enthusiast,—he got that from his father; and the 'boy' had no idea of what life meant for an unprotected, penniless girl.

"Of course I cannot drag her to church, and Hegebach is not the man to go on his knees for a wife. What you say, my boy, sounds very fine, if there is anything to live upon. You know—none better—that theory and practice are two entirely

different things. I've gone over that chapter often enough of late. I shall say nothing further about it. My grandmother used to say, 'Love?—love is for the most part fancy.' I have known plenty of girls who were ready to drown themselves for their first lover, whom they could not marry, but who found afterwards that the man whom they did marry was their only real choice. Nonsense, Moritz! You are perfectly ridiculous; your views are such as only a love-sick school-girl or a half-cracked, sentimental old maid could utter unrebuked."

"It may be," he said, "that your views are entertained by the many, but I cannot believe it."

He paused opposite Frieda, and looked down to her with eyes that sparkled. "Frieda, do you speak up for the honour of your sex!"

- "I do not know what you mean." The little lady turned her head aside in some confusion.
- "Hegebach has proposed for Elsie to-day, and she----"
- "For Elsie!" Her astonished eyes glanced from her husband to her mother-in-law, still quietly knitting. "Indeed!" And she burst into a fit of laughter.

Involuntarily he started. What did this almost convulsive laughter, seeming so near to weeping, mean? She had changed colour, and the tears were running down her cheeks.

"Of course you dissuaded her, Moritz?" she said, still laughing.

"Dissuaded? No, Frieda; on the contrary, I tried to convince her of the necessity of this step; though I was sorry afterwards that I did so."

"Indeed!" The little lady was not laughing now. "I cannot imagine what the castle would be without Elsie von Hegebach; it is quite inconceivable."

"What do you mean by that?" the old Frau's voice interposed.

"Oh, nothing, mamma dear; Moritz understands me."

"I regret to say that I do not, Frieda," he quietly rejoined.

"But I do!" Frau von Ratenow arose and confronted her daughter-in-law. "I have made great allowance for you, my child,—I have always excused the moods and caprices from which the entire household has suffered, because I supposed that you were truly devoted to your husband. If he allowed you to torment him, it was his affair,—he had chosen to have it so. But if you should dare, even in thought, to accuse him of dishonour,"—she raised her voice,—"if you should dare to sully the reputation of the girl brought up beneath my roof, Frieda, good God! I shall forget that you are the wife of my only son and the mother of his children!"

"Stay!" said Moritz, gently putting aside the hand his mother had raised in warning. "Frieda did not know what she was saying. She does not mean it."

The young wife sat still, ashy pale, a passionate defiance in her air. "Yes," she exclaimed, springing to her feet, "I do mean it. I know well what I said. Since Elsie von Hegebach has been in the house he has not been the same; he has eyes and ears for her only. I should and do know this far better than you and the rest."

"Silence!" the old Frau commanded, with such calm dignity that the beautiful mouth was involun-"What did I tell you long ago, Motarily mute. ritz," she turned to her son, "when you were wooing your wife?—'Never weary in your training of her, or she will get beyond your control.' Now you are reaping the reward of your boundless compliance, your foolish indulgence. There are women and children for whom kindness is poison. And this was a love-match! My own was not so, but I respected your father and could never have dared to insult him. All that is left for you is to pray your wife's forgiveness, my boy, and the chapter in a modern matrimonial romance is complete."

"You know perfectly well, mother, that I shall not do that," he rejoined, gloomily.

But the old Frau only half heard him. She

had gone into her bedroom, and bolted the door after her.

"Frieda," he said, sadly, turning to his wife, "you have allowed your imagination to lead you terribly astray. God knows you could not have wounded me more deeply."

She stood before him, plucking at her lace handkerchief, her blue eyes swimming in tears.

"Go, Frieda, calm yourself," he entreated, "and then let us talk quietly of this. Good heavens! what could have put such an idea into your head?"

He was pale; she could not but see that she had wounded this true heart to its very core, but she refused to admit it to herself. She shook off his hand, and hastily left the room; she was bitterly abused, she was a wretched wife—oh——

"Lili!" she sobbed, falling on her sister's neck in her own room, "it is too horrible, in addition to all other wretchedness, to have such a mother-in-law! Big and old as Moritz is, he is still tied to her apron-string like a little child, and never once takes my part when she treats me like a little school-girl. But then why should he? He loves me no more!"

It was a very disagreeable day, the one now drawing to a close, and it was followed by a very disagreeable evening. Frieda locked herself in her room and would not see Moritz. Lili announced this to him, and the eyes with which she glanced at her brother-in-law were those with which she would have looked upon a criminal of the most desperate description. The children were screaming in their nursery, and when their father tried to quiet them his gloomy air frightened them. He went out of doors; the air of the house seemed stifling. He walked at last out of the court-yard down the avenue in the fragrant spring atmosphere, and then sauntered through the gateway into the town. The streets were still quite gay, the children were playing before their doors, neighbours were gossiping with one another, and the moonlight was almost garish.

"Halloo! my dear Ratenow!" a voice exclaimed, and some one tapped him on the shoulder. "What are you doing here? If you want company come into the Casino with me; Rost is doing the honours of a bowl of punch to celebrate his betrothal."

Captain von P. confronted him. Moritz was in no mood for such an occasion; he excused himself on the plea of not being in evening dress, but finally yielded, and went with the captain.

In the officers' luxurious mess-room a lively conversation was going on when the gentlemen entered. The fortunate suitor was the gravest of the assemblage, with the exception of the Bennewitzer, who was smoking his cigar quite apathetically.

"What the deuce! Herr von Hegebach," Moritz

said, with forced gayety; "are you here? How comes Saul among the prophets?"

"I have been captured, as seems to have been the case with yourself, my dear Ratenow," he replied, drawing a chair up beside his own for Moritz. "I did not wish to drive home just yet; you know there are days in one's life when there is no rest to be found anywhere."

Moritz was silent; he knew what was meant. He himself, in the morning, had begged the suitor to be patient until the next day,—had told him that Elsie was so surprised, his proposal had come upon her so suddenly,—and had added everything else that is always said when the desire is to gain time.

The punch was soon deserted for champagne. Rost was extremely lavish; he had 'such an excellent devil of a father-in-law,' who had promised to help him to arrange his affairs before the marriage,—what difference could a couple of bottles of champagne more or less make?

"Did you send the announcement to Bernardi, Rost?" asked the fat Referendar, Dölling.

"Of course," Rost replied. "I hope he'll send his congratulations by telegraph; his letters are insufferably dismal. It is inconceivable how he came to have all the woes of the world piled upon his shoulders."

"His letters are a deal more cheerful than he is himself," said one of the young men; "he positively

does nothing but work or play the fiddle. I tried, on my last leave, to get him to go about a bit,—else where's the use of being stationed in a fairly respectable town? Devil a bit would he go; he told me, with a grand and gloomy air, that such doings disgusted him, and that he held the Tivoli Theatre in special abhorrence." The others laughed. "I did not annoy him further," the young officer concluded, filling his glass. "We cavalrymen are not persistent."

"I positively and really believe that he is going to resign," another drawled, slowly. "I learned it really quite accidentally. He asked an uncle of mine, who really is a fanatic in the musical way, whether he really thought he had enough talent in that line to be really a success as an artist."

"And then," the Referendar interposed, mimicking the speaker's drawl, "your uncle, it is to be hoped, replied, 'Bernardi, my dear fellow, you really are absurd; you really scrape the strings fairly well, but really something more is needed to make a successful artist nowadays.'"

Lieutenant von Rost, who was not easily discomposed, looked annoyed. "Such a fellow!" he said in a low tone to his left-hand neighbour. "It was with the greatest pains and trouble that he was saved from committing a terrible folly, and now he wants to make a still bigger fool of himself; he is simply insane."

But his remark was drowned in the tumultuous vivat of his comrades in honour of his fair betrothed.

"A health to Fräulein Annie Cramm! It shall be drunk with three times three!" exclaimed one and another of the gay party.

"And a health to all lovely women!" called out Captain von P., and again there was a clinking of glasses.

Moritz rose suddenly. In the mood in which he was, he could not stay any longer in the midst of this uproar.

"Are you going?" asked the Bennewitzer. "I will go with you, if you will allow me."

"Are you lodging here in the hotel?" Moritz asked in the hall, while the *vivats* of the officers still resounded from their mess-room.

"Yes; but I will walk with you for a while, Ratenow."

It had grown very quiet in the streets; the moon shone bright above the town, and a delicate mist hung like a gauzy silver veil over the pointed gables, weaving a fairy charm about the outlines of the houses and trees. They walked along together in silence; neither could find exactly the words in which to begin a conversation.

"My dear Ratenow," the elder man at last spoke, "I should be sorry to have you, of all men, misapprehend me. Your looks this morning made

me fear that you do so. I am not vain enough to believe that a young girl like Elsie von Hegebach will fall with delight into my open arms, nor am I of an age to be driven restlessly abroad by the expectation of a decisive answer from rosy lips, or to contemplate suicide with joy in case that answer should be a refusal. I have endured too much from fate for this. The reasons which induced me to woo my cousin are only half selfish. They are to be found largely in an earnest desire to enable my cousin Hegebach and his child to share the fortune left by our uncle; and this is the only way in which it can be done legally. But"he paused, and laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder-"I must add that I never should have conceived this scheme had not the young girl affected me sympathetically in the highest degree. I say sympathetically, my dear Ratenow. At my years passionate affection is out of the question."

They walked on. Moritz was silent; he knew perfectly well that this man was speaking truth; he knew that he could choose where he would,—he was still a handsome man, his heart was large and true, he might still lay claim to happiness in the world, and yet—

"During these last few weeks, Ratenow, I have continually pictured to myself the future," the Bennewitzer went on, with a tender tone in his voice. "I have seen Elsie's form gliding about my solitary home, and I have heard her voice charming my ear with a promise of happiness. I have gone through the rooms which I have arranged for my cousin Hegebach, and I have marked out on the map the route to be taken when I should unfold to those wondering childlike eyes the world beyond the Alps. God knows, Ratenow, it would give me unutterable delight to reveal to that youthful mind the thousand beauties of nature and art that make so fair a world, and——"

He hesitated. "I once travelled through the Black Forest into Switzerland with my eldest boy, and I never shall forget the pleasure I took in the undisguised rapture, the naïve wonder, of that youthful nature. I should like once again to see— Ratenow," he asked, suddenly, "is not that some one coming towards us?"

They had reached the entrance of the avenue. The dark trunks of the trees stood out in strong relief in the moonlight, and through the thin mist a slender figure was certainly hurrying, almost running, towards them.

"It is a woman," said Moritz. "It is Elsie," he added, after a minute. "Elsie! for Heaven's sake, Elsie! where are you going? How you look, child!"

She threw her arms around him. He felt her whole frame tremble. "To my father, Moritz!—take me to my father!"

"What is the matter, Elsie? Tell me."

He unclasped her arms from his neck and looked into her face. It was ghastly pale. "Ill," she said, with quivering lips. "Barbara came to call me, and I ran down the avenue. Take me to him, Moritz."

He drew her trembling arm within his own. "Come, my little girl."

"I will go with you," said the Bennewitzer.
"Has a physician been sent for, do you know, Elsie?"

She shook her head, and hurried onwards. Her companions had much ado to keep pace with her. She had on neither hat nor wrap, and in the uncertain light there was something ghostlike in her appearance and movements. She was at the top of the stairs of the house in the narrow street before the gentlemen had fairly entered it. In the dim hall above, the physician came towards them.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said, in a low voice.
"I sent for the daughter. He will not live until morning."

They stood in the comfortless little room next that of the old man; the moon shone full into it, and lay in strips upon the bare floor, flecked by the tremulous shadows of the young leaves of the trees outside. "Tick, tick, tick, tick," said the old Schwarzwald clock, and through the half-open door of the next room came a sound of stertorous breathing.

"Papa!" a voice suddenly shrieked, "do not go! do not leave me so alone, so terribly alone!"

The physician took one hasty step towards the door, then paused again; the dying man was speaking slowly, brokenly, almost unintelligibly.

"No, no, papa, do not die! do not die! I must tell you something, dear papa. Listen! can you hear me?"

The physician went in. After a minute he came back and beckoned to the Bennewitzer. He obeyed the gesture, and his glance sought the girl. She was on the floor beside the arm-chair in which her father lay back, her arms clasped about his knees; the old man's right hand rested upon her head, and his half-unconscious eyes were turned towards his cousin.

"It has come soon, cousin—but I am much—calmer, because—Elsie, your hand—I have done nothing for you while I lived, poor child—forgive me—and you were always good and obedient—forgive me, Elsie—make death easy for me—life—has been so hard."

She raised her head and looked around as if entreating pity, but the weary, dying eyes could not see the look, could not perceive what it meant. She only felt how his hand groped painfully for her own, and, when it was found, made a feeble attempt to raise it and lay it in another hand. The complete and sacred majesty of death suddenly impressed and

overcame her at sight of the fearful change in his face, and, helplessly resigning herself to its influence, she felt a warm hand clasp her own, while that of the dying man rested motionless upon both.

"Wilhelm, my dear Wilhelm," a voice spoke, trembling with emotion, "I will protect and guard her, I promise."

"Elsie," whispered her dying father, "you are not left alone—no—poor—forsaken girl—no, Elsie——"

She lay utterly powerless, with her head upon his knee and her hand still in that of the Bennewitzer; a blood-red mist seemed to hover before her eyes, and she could not think clearly. Then she heard Moritz's voice say, "It is over. Come, Elsie, my dear little girl!" Some one helped her up, and she knew no more.

When she wakened, Frau von Ratenow sat beside the sofa where she lay; the old lady in her morning-gown leaned her head against the back of her chair and was sleeping. The beams of the rising sun streamed into the little room red and glowing, transfiguring it by their splendour.

The girl started up; the scenes of the past night flashed vividly upon her mind. Ah, it is terrible when a few hours' sleep has banished the sad present to have its weight of misery fall with double dreariness when the tortured mind awakes to consciousness, only to be terrified anew, to be crushed once more to the earth!

She passed her hand over her brow; was it true? And as if to convince herself, she arose, and glided past the sleeping Frau von Ratenow into the next room.

A strong draught of air greeted her; the windows were open, and a white sheet had been spread over what lay upon the bed. She gazed motionless at it; her heart seemed to turn cold, and involuntarily she clasped her hands. "Our Father who art in heaven," echoed through her bewildered soul,—she could not but pray, and yet had no power to clothe her anguish, her yearning misery, in words of her own,—"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Suddenly shrill tones resounded through the room; below, in the street, the trumpeter was blowing the reveille according to custom. "To wake up papa's soldiers," Aunt Lott used to tell the little girl when the cheerful notes were heard over at the castle.

"Come, Elsie, my girl, that will not rouse him now," said Frau von Ratenow's voice, as the old lady drew the girl towards her. "It is well with him, my child, and you would not grudge him his repose, would you?"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE GRAVE TOGETHER.

THE funeral was over. The gentlemen who had attended it took leave of Moritz and of the Bennewitzer at the gate of the church-yard, where the funeral train dispersed.

Lieutenant von Rost sauntered across the road to greet his betrothed and her mother, who were taking a walk there, perhaps not solely for the enjoyment of the fresh air, but with some curiosity to see the funeral procession. Frau Cramm was interested in such occasions, and Annie no less so; a great fire, a wedding, or a funeral generally found mother and daughter among the spectators.

The lover bowed and walked beside Annie, but without offering her his arm; he was not especially noted for gallantry, and, moreover, was determined not to spoil his betrothed before marriage by superabundant attentions, the lack of which, however, was deeply felt by Annie. It would have been so charming to go along the street linked tenderly arm in arm, that people might see how much they loved each other.

"My dear Rost," Frau Cramm began, "have you heard about Fräulein von Hegebach? Annie tells me that she seems actually paralyzed with grief."

The young lady assented eagerly. "Yes; fancy, Leo, I was there awhile ago,—she scarcely spoke, and she looks wretched. And yet she was only measurably fond of the old man. There can be no reason au fond for such despair. But she is crushed. Can you understand it?"

He dropped his eye-glass from his eye. "It seems quite possible," he replied,—"two such terrible shocks at once."

"Two!" mother and daughter exclaimed simultaneously.

He paused for a moment, and then said, "She was betrothed to the Bennewitzer beside her father's death-bed."

There was a double exclamation of astonishment. "What luck that girl has!" cried the stout elderly lady in the velvet wrap.

"It is astonishing, is it not?" Lieutenant von Rost asked, in a tone which left one in doubt whether he was serious or sarcastic.

"Such immense luck!" Frau Councillor Cramm repeated. "That splendid place Bennewitz, and those fine carriages! Why, last year Prince H—stayed there for the hunting."

Annie was silent. She was thinking how, at

school, Elsie used to sit until she was almost worn out over her books, studying for the governess examinations, and how plainly she was always dressed. Yes, indeed, she was lucky. Who would have thought it?

And thus the news of the betrothal of the orphan to her cousin was quickly spread abroad in the little town, while she herself sat in her room, in her long trailing mourning-gown, above which her pale face, with the pathetic lines of melancholy about the mouth, looked ghostlike and ethereal.

She had not said much since that morning, but Aunt Ratenow had talked all the more. Nor had she wept; but she had gone about with a troubled face, had wandered from room to room, or seated herself with hands clasped in her lap and looks bent gloomily upon the ground; she scarcely took any nourishment,-she scarcely slept at night. Ever and anon she saw before her her dying father's colourless face, she felt his anxious groping for her hand, and the chain which he had woven about it, the invisible, terrible chain which she must carry all her life long. Was it not worse than cruelty to exert the sacred power of the hour of death-the stringent force of a last wish-to make a human heart wretched for life? "Father, you never loved me!" she moaned. And then she saw again the happy smile as he placed her hand in that other; she heard the last faint sigh breathed, as if the poor

breast were relieved of an intolerable burden. He died content,—he died calm; and she must live, live on! Oh, it was horrible!

She had not yet seen again him in whose hand her father had placed her own, and Frau von Ratenow had not insisted further. Her mute, profound grief was too far removed from the joy of a betrothal. But now that the funeral was over, her betrothed desired to speak with her who had been confided to his care in so solemn an hour.

Frau von Ratenow, likewise in mourning, went up-stairs to announce to Elsie this important visit. She had two sprays of cypress in her hand. The Bennewitzer had taken them from the coffin before it was lowered into the grave, and had brought them as a last greeting from the father to the daughter.

The erect old Frau knocked at the door a trifle less firmly than was her wont, and then entered. Elsie was sitting at her table, with a pen in her hand and a sheet of paper before her. She thrust the letter which she had begun into her portfolio and arose. Frau von Ratenow put the cypress boughs into her hand and stroked her pale cheeks.

"Hegebach sends his love, Elsie. He thought you might wish to go, with him beside you, to the grave. The carriage is waiting. Will you get ready? He will come for you up here."

At the words 'with him beside you,' the girl shrank, and a crimson flush overspread the pale

cheek for a moment. She made no reply, but gently shook her fair head.

"Why have you drawn all the curtains close," the old lady asked, "as if God's sunshine were something dreadful?" And she parted the curtains, so that the dazzling sunlight streamed into the room and encircled the girlish head like a nimbus. She had to close her eyes, the light was so pitilessly brilliant.

"Look out, Elsie!" Frau von Ratenow took her hand and drew her towards the window. "See how the buds are swelling on the apple-trees, and how blue the skies are! We must pay a due respect to the dead, my child, but the living must not be forgotten, and you have duties to perform in life. You must take heart and exert yourself."

The girl did not raise her eyes; she grew, if possible, still paler.

"I am going down now, Elsie; I have a few words to say to Frieda,—I was interrupted just now,—and I will send your betrothed up here to you. At such a time as this the rules of etiquette are of no moment, and, besides, he is no young gallant. When you come back from the churchyard come and drink a cup of coffee in my room with me. God bless you, child!"

She was gone. In agony the girl buried her hands in her fair, soft hair. Was there no escape? She looked around the room in wild terror: the

time had come for keeping the promise in which her heart had no part. Oh, to be free !—to be free once more! It was intolerable to reflect that all such thoughts were a crime. Mechanically she arranged about her shoulders her little black mantle and put on her mourning-bonnet; but the hands that should have tied the strings dropped by her sides,—there, upon the threshold—— "Cousin!" she stammered.

He advanced towards her, and, taking both her hands in his, pressed them to his lips. "My dear Elsie," he said, tenderly, "the hour that gave us to each other was very sad, but sacred and solemn likewise,—a warrant, I trust, of future faithful and cordial affection."

His voice was tender, but what he said sounded nevertheless formal, almost pedantic. The girl took a deep breath, as if of relief, but she was silent.

"Would you like, Elsie, to go with me now to visit your father's grave?"

She bowed her head in assent. He took her sunshade from the table and handed it to her, and then he offered her his arm. She rested her hand upon it scarcely perceptibly, and thus they left the room and walked down the stairs and through the hall to the carriage. He handed her in among the soft cushions of silver-gray satin, and carefully wrapped the rich carriage-robe about her. She had not hitherto lifted her eyes; but now, as they

drove off, she glanced upwards. Frau von Ratenow, standing at her window, waved her hand.

A feeling of unutterable misery overwhelmed the girl as she drove along in the elegant equipage. She felt degraded in her own eyes, and hastily pulled her crape veil down over her face. It seemed to shame her to have the pure, clear sunlight shine into it.

She took no notice of the arm offered her at the gate of the church-yard, but walked hurriedly onwards.

"Where are you going, Elsie?" he asked; "the grave is on this side."

But she had sunk down upon another mound, and her hands were clasped tightly, as if in agonized prayer. If she who slept below were only alive! A mother never could thrust her child forth into a loveless life,—no, never!

He stood on one side quietly waiting. It was long before she arose, turned, and followed him to the freshly-made grave, where the sods were piled unevenly,—a sad sight, which the wreaths heaped upon it seemed vainly attempting to conceal.

Here she stayed her steps without a word, without a tear. He took her hand; she gently withdrew it.

"Shall we go?" he asked, after a quarter of an hour of profound silence. She assented, and again walked on quickly before him along the narrow

pathway between the graves. At the carriage she hesitated; she would rather have walked. silently offered her his hand to help her into the vehicle, and silently he seated himself beside her. He knew well what it was to return from a freshlymade grave. He thought her mournful, gloomy air perfectly natural, although there was a strange, shy gravity that was almost austerity at times noticeable in her demeanour. They should learn to laugh again, those brown childlike eyes, when they were no longer forced to look upon want and grim necessity, when the intoxicating fragrance of a luxurious sunlit existence should be wafted around that pale face in the well-appointed rooms and the magnificent park at Bennewitz. She should find her smiles again upon their travels; he would first show her Paris. She was but a mortal maiden after all, and Paris-well, Paris is a word that holds a world of undefined attraction for the feminine apprehension.

She had covered her face with her veil again, and sat looking neither to the right nor to the left. As they drove along, Lieutenant von Rost and Captain von H—— were standing on the sidewalk. They bowed, and looked after the carriage and the fluttering crape veil of her who sat inside it.

"She has not yet learned," said von Rost, "to lie back among the cushions like a grande dame; she sat up like a chidden child on her bench at school. Well, she'll get bravely over that; women have an incredible talent for that sort of thing."

"Do you think she is positively in love?" asked you H—.

"Pshaw!" said Rost, examining his horse, which his servant had just led up.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD FRAU DISTURBED.

Frau von Ratenow had meanwhile been with Frieda, whose mood was unchanged and apparently quite unchangeable. She had scarcely uttered a word of sympathy for the orphan. Lili, indeed, had gone up to Elsie's room, determined to be very measured in her condolences, but the sight of the silent, wan, wretched girl had been too much for her kindly, inconstant nature; her eyes were red with crying when she went down to Frieda again.

"Good heavens! what for?" the young wife asked, fretfully. "She has done wonderfully well for herself, it seems to me. Pray do not you begin, like Moritz, who alludes to this betrothal as if it were a general misfortune."

"But, Frieda, no girl looks as she does, however she may mourn, who can look forward to any degree of happiness. No, Frieda, you are in a bad humour, and want some one upon whom to wreak it. Ah, I know you well, my little sister! She once robbed you of an admirer, Friedchen, hey? For you never can seriously be jealous on Moritz's account. Why, good heavens! he never so much as cared to look at any one but yourself."

But neither raillery nor persuasion had availed to dispel the little lady's ill humour; everything had gone wrong since Elsie came, and now there was no prospect of her going away. Of course, all due regard must be paid to her affliction; she was now not a person to be overlooked; she was betrothed to a man who had always taken the lead in society, who was considered one of the magnates of the province. And Frieda pinned the fichu of her darkblue silk gown with a coral brooch. She was not in mourning. What did she care for the peevish old man who had just closed his weary eyes?

The old Frau presented herself with an expression of such satisfaction in her broad face that the black crape on her dress contrasted strangely with it. All her hopes for the girl were fulfilled! the poor little soul had really drawn a first-class prize. And how well she conducted herself! so self-possessed and grave, and yet with a degree of pride in her bearing! and how pretty she looked in her deep mourning! She had not once attempted, as before her father's death, to play the prude. Ah! the glance of an eye that is just closing forever exerts a wonderful, a sacred power, and causes everything hitherto regarded as important to seem like mere child's play. Elsie had indeed been glad to grasp the protecting hand stretched out to her just

at the moment when the ship of her existence was beginning to toss rudderless on the wild sea of life.

"She is a dear, good child, God bless her!" Sorrow for the departed was not very poignant in the old Frau's heart. One thing indeed grieved her: she would have liked to have him enjoy the delight of living for a few years in luxury; but here, too, God did all things for the best. Hegebach and the Bennewitzer had never agreed too well, and perhaps he might have disturbed the perfect harmony of the Bennewitz household. And he had always been delicate. Yes, yes, it was a blessed release for him; he was at peace.

With a very kindly 'good-morning' she sat down in one of Frieda's dainty arm-chairs, and in a loud, clear voice asked after the health of her grandchildren so cheerfully that Frieda opened wide her blue eyes in surprise.

"Well, Frieda," she went on, pleasantly, "and what have you to say about Elsie? Your foolish fancies have been scattered to the winds by this time, eh?" And she took her daughter-in-law's hand. "Let me tell you, little pet, that a great burden has been lifted from my mind,—you must see that it is so,—and when anything pleases me I want other people to be pleased also. You must choose something very fine for your birthday present, Friedchen. Yes? Come, out with it! Lili, help her to make a choice."

The cloud did not yet clear from the young wife's brow, although her mother-in-law's words were promising enough. Mamma Ratenow was magnificent in her gifts.

"You are very kind, mamma dear," came slowly from the full crimson lips; "I---"

"Well, you shall have time to reflect; you need not be in a hurry. I thought perhaps you might like a little trip with Moritz,—a season in Baden-Baden, a glimpse of Switzerland and the Italian lakes,—eh? I will take care of the children. Think about it, my dear. Good-morning. I must go and see after Moritz. He is with his lambs. Good-morning, children."

Yes, yes, she understood how to find a tune for all to which they were glad to dance, and she knew that her words would never fail of their effect. Nor did they here. The two sisters were soon sitting close together on a lounge, looking over the latest fashion-prints. Here was an elegant travelling-dress; how would it look in another colour,—say navy-blue? Moritz was not fond of travelling, to be sure, he had to put up with too many inconveniences; and then, too, he did not like the expense. Frau Frieda had no idea of travelling inexpensively, but now he could not help himself. Travel!—oh, word of rapture! Travel! Baden-Baden——!

Moritz was really the only one who was obstinate.

"What is the matter with you, my boy?" his mother asked. "How can you take Frieda's stupid whimsicalities so to heart? She is in a fair way to be perfectly sensible again."

He looked positively indignant. "You entirely misapprehend me, mother. I have simply ignored Frieda's ill humour, although I cannot help admitting that her conduct wounded me. It may be, however, that there was some justice in her accusation. I was perhaps over-anxious as to the fate of the girl."

They were walking together across the court-yard during this conversation. The spring sunshine lay golden on the old mansion; the huge lindens by the arched gateway were decked with young emerald-green leaves that looked transparent in the brilliant light; upon the roofs of the farm-buildings long rows of doves were sunning themselves; suddenly they took flight, and their fluttering wings gleamed silver against the intense blue of the sky.

A carriage rolled swiftly into the court-yard and drew up before the hall door.

"The betrothed pair, Moritz," Frau von Ratenow said, advancing hastily. "Where are you going, Moritz?"

Her son only lifted his cap from his fair hair and passed on, with a bow, towards the stables. "I must look after Sultana; the farrier is coming to-day to examine her foot again." "Queer!" murmured the old lady, quickening her steps, and reaching the hall door just in time to take the small, black-gloved hand in her own warm clasp.

Elsie looked strange,—so stern and determined. Good heavens! yes—her father,—but this demeanour was unnatural; if she would only have wept!
And she sat silent and erect in an arm-chair in her
aunt's comfortable room while the rest drank their
coffee. The glass folding-doors were open into the
garden-room, and the soft warm air of spring floated
in; the sunshine lay broad and hot on the stone
pavement of the terrace, and here and there in the
room a single ray gleamed, a distinct strip of light
in which millions of motes were dancing.

The girl had turned her shapely head and gazed out into the sunshine with dry eyes, without speaking, without taking the least part in the conversation. What had she to do with it?

She seemed to herself thrust out from a fair, blooming garden into wintry ice and snow; there she stood, freezing, freezing to the very marrow of her bones. And the roses in the garden nodded their lovely heads at her and asked, "Why did you allow yourself to be compelled?"

And the swallows flew by, twittering, "Is this your courage? Are you not ashamed?"

And she was ashamed; genuine maidenly shame dyed her cheeks in sudden crimson. She started

up, and hurried out upon the terrace and down into the dear old garden, gliding along the familiar paths with flying feet.

"My dear Frau von Ratenow," said the Bennewitzer, when Elsie left the room thus suddenly, "is my betrothed ill? I must honestly confess to you this mute despair makes me anxious. Can it really be *only* the shock of her father's sudden death that has so changed her?"

The old lady shook her head with decision. "My dear Hegebach, the girls of to-day are not what they were in our time. Then they led fresh, healthy lives; to-day a degree of melancholy belongs to good society. And, moreover, remember that the funeral took place to-day, and that, in spite of everything, she was tenderly, almost foolishly, attached to her father."

"Do you think so, madame?" he asked, slowly settling himself among the cushions of his armchair in a rather more comfortable position than he had allowed himself in the presence of his youthful betrothed. "I do not know; a short time ago she seemed to me a child. It was the expression of her eyes, I think. When I went up to-day to her room she looked at me—yes, you may call me sentimental, madame, but I cannot forget her look; it was reproachful, appealing. I saw the same look once in a pair of eyes long ago. I shall never forget it. It was in Russia. A young gypsy girl was beg-

ging by the roadside. My coachman, a rough fellow, struck her over the head with his whip; she never moved an eyelash, but her large dark eyes turned upon me. There was a world of mystery in that look. Those eyes above the pathetic mouth, appealing, reproachful,—Elsie had them today when I went for her. And I—I cannot but think—I must say that there was more in that look than grief for the loss of her father."

"Hegebach!" was the rejoinder, in a tone of intense reproach. The stately old Frau would not admit to herself that his words caused a strangely uncomfortable sensation in her mind. She shook her head, and looked searchingly in the face of her guest, but she could find no words in which to reply to him. In her embarrassment she filled her cup to the brim from the coffee-urn, rose, and handed Herr von Hegebach a cigar, and then asked, "Where can Elsie have gone? Let us take a stroll in the garden."

They sauntered along the pleasant garden-paths, but no Elsie was to be seen. Across the low wall they saw Frieda and Lili return from a short drive they had taken with the children, and they saw Moritz ride out of the court-yard; he bowed to them, and called out that he was going to the newly-sown meadows.

"I cannot imagine where Elsie can be; she is a strange girl." And the old Frau called, in her

strong, clear voice, 'Elsie! Elsie!' so that it could be heard all through the garden.

There was no reply.

"I pray you, my dear Frau von Ratenow, to leave my betrothed to herself. She does not feel at all like talking. I can readily understand that."

She walked on in silence. Now and then the Bennewitzer paused and examined the budding shrubs, and mentioned their botanical names. His companion was too uneasy to respond to him.

"I shall be obliged to take an early leave of you to-day," he said at last, looking at his watch. "I pray you to bid Elsie good-by for me."

"I will send for her, my dear Hegebach."

"No, I beg you will not; perhaps she is indulging in the relief of tears. Do not disturb her, madame. I will come again to-morrow. Her mood must be respected."

He requested the gardener's assistant, who was passing, to order his carriage round, then calmly went on smoking as he referred to various indifferent matters.

"By the way, my dear Hegebach," the old lady interrupted him, "what did you tell me was the name of the firm in Berlin of whom you ordered the betrothal rings?"

"Haller & Company," he replied. "They will not be ready before the end of a week."

"Of course not," she declared, "they have such

a rush of business. Thomas, here, on Friedrich Street, could have made them quite as well, and much more quickly. But you are like all the rest, Hegebach."

He smiled, but took no other notice of her reproach.

"I think I heard the carriage drive to the door," he said. "Allow me to take my leave of you, madame, until to-morrow; and give my love to my sad little Elsie."

He kissed her hand, walked lightly up the terrace steps, and vanished within the house. In a few minutes his carriage rolled rapidly away over the stones of the court-yard.

"And what, I should like to know, did the Bennewitzer mean by that story about the eyes? There is no necessity for him at his age to gaze into the child's eyes like an ensign just out of his teens,

and that soft-hearted languishing air is not at all his style; he never was so before." She passed her hand over her forehead, and a few minutes later appeared in the dairy suddenly, like a grim ghost. The housekeeper nearly fell down in her fright, having supposed madame to be anywhere save just here: was she not drinking coffee with the betrothed pair?

"Come, come!" the old Frau said, in her deep voice; "do not faint, although 'tis the fashion now-adays." And she went from pan to pan and looked into all the butter-buckets. She was not in a good humour. She could not go on with her knitting as usual,—the girl's pale face was always before her, and she heard the Bennewitzer prating about her eyes. But there was no help for it, she must talk to Elsie,—in all kindness, of course, but it must be done.

She rose to go up to her, but Moritz came in, and, taking his usual chair, opposite her own, had so many things to say, so many matters to discuss, that she stayed to talk with him. His question, "Has Hegebach gone already?" she answered briefly by, "As you see." And then he began talking about the new kind of feed for cattle. This was not the time to tell him of the girl's odd behaviour.

[&]quot;Where is Elsie?" he asked, at last.

[&]quot;Up in her own room, I suspect. But how did

you bring yourself to intrust Sultana to the young veterinary surgeon? I saw him come from the stables awhile ago."

"I did not want to let my pet wait any longer, and the district vet. is ill."

"Ah, indeed!" she said, but her thoughts were far away. Then the young ladies and the children came in. Lili was very merry, and the children were full of play; there was laughing and shouting and merriment in the darkening room. When at last the little ones said 'good-night' it was quite late, and the moonlight lay in dazzling brightness upon the roofs of the farm-buildings.

"Are you coming to sup with us?" asked Moritz; "and is Elsie coming down?"

"No, thank you," she replied. "Sophie can bring supper here for both of us. Elsie is not yet in the mood,—you understand."

"Then good-night, mother."

The old lady rose hurriedly from her seat; she must speak to Elsie. She went swiftly up the staircase and lifted the latch of the door of the girl's room; it was flooded with clear, white light; the windows were wide open, and with the moonlight the sweet fragrance of violets had found its way inside. All was still.

"Elsie," she said, very softly, looking searchingly about the room. The girl was lying on her bed; the old lady crossed the room and bent over

her. Positively she was asleep! and in her hand she held a bunch of faded violets pressed to her breast. At the foot of the bed one of the drawers in an antique bureau was open, and hanging half out of it was a crushed white muslin gown with rose-coloured ribbons.

She knew the dress, and she knew the bunch of violets, and she could not but see before her the girl as she had seen her on that evening, with the happy, childlike eyes. She stood there motionless, and suddenly a strange mood overcame the old Frau,—a mood to which she had long, long been a stranger. Was it caused by the breath of violets, and by the nightingale's 'linked sweetness long drawn out,' floating up from the moonlit garden? As though on fairy feet she stole out into the corridor, and in a minute was again in her dark room, where she sat for a long while with her head leaning on her hand.

"Nonsense!" she whispered at last, and, rising, went to the table where were the matches. "Nonsense!" she repeated aloud, as she scraped a match and the tiny flame burst forth beneath her fingers. "I shall certainly talk to her to-morrow, and I shall speak my mind."

CHAPTER XIV.

GONE!

EARLY the next morning it rained, and dark clouds veiled the rising sun, but yet everything was green,—and such a green!

In the out-buildings the maids were astir, the stable-boys had begun to feed the cattle; but in the castle silence still reigned, except that a light footfall echoed along the corridor, and a slender figure glided down the stairs, through the lower hall and the kitchen, and through the servants' room, into the open air.

It was rather cool, and Elsie von Hegebach drew her veil down over her face, and went directly across the court-yard and through the arched gateway into the avenue. The housekeeper, who was just going to the dairy, looked after her and shook her head. "I believe she is going directly to the church-yard," she said to a dairy-maid.

"She had a travelling-bag in her hand," said the other. And then they went on to the dairy.

At the door of one of the stables a tall, fair-haired man stood looking after her with honest blue eyes and a grave face. He knew what she

was doing, and he did not stir a finger to waylay or hinder her. "But whither?" he asked, half aloud, standing there motionless until the dark, slender figure disappeared at the end of the avenue. Then he went again to see his ailing horse, and to pat its sleek, shining neck as it gazed at him with loving eyes. As, after half an hour, he slowly crossed the court-yard towards the castle, he heard the shrill whistle of a locomotive from the other side of the town.

"Farewell, Elsie, my dear little girl," he said, softly. "If you are acting wisely I do not know, but that you are acting rightly I do know."

It was about nine o'clock when Frau von Ratenow sent her maid up-stairs to ask Fräulein von Hegebach to come to her. The old Frau was sitting by the window as usual, and she looked very grave, and a little pale. She had passed a bad night, troubled by distressing dreams and all kinds of evil forebodings; that wretched white dress, and the faded violets, and Elsie's strange behaviour had had their share in her disturbance. And in the broad light of this morning the old lady had been very angry with herself; she ought to have wakened the girl last evening and to have talked to her there and then. Ought she, a betrothed maiden, to give a thought to any other man? And who was that other? A fellow such as one might see a dozen of in a day's walk, with

nothing to distinguish him except a talent for playing the fiddle. An end must be put to it all,—kindly, of course, but still an end.

"Fräulein von Hegebach is not in her room," the maid came back to say.

"Then look for her in the garden."

The maid hesitated. "I do not think, madame, that the Fräulein is there. The housekeeper says that Fräulein von Hegebach went to the churchyard shortly after dawn this morning."

"Nonsense!" The old lady arose. "When was that?"

"About four o'clock, madame, the housekeeper says."

"And now it is nine! Look for her in the garden."

The maid departed. Her mistress sat quietly down again, and looked across the court-yard. The servant did not return very soon. The old lady would not be anxious; where could Elsie go to? She would be found.

"I cannot find the Fräulein," the servant reported, when she came back. "Dora says she had a travelling-bag with her."

"Very well. Fräulein von Hegebach will soon return."

The maid left the room. For a while the old lady sat still in her place, then she went up-stairs and to the room of the missing girl. Everything was as GONE! 205

usual here,—nothing was gone,—except the little writing-case, the crucifix above the bed, and her prayer-book; but these Frau von Ratenow did not yet miss. The bureau-drawers were closed, and when the old Frau opened one of them, there lay the crushed muslin gown, carefully folded.

"She will soon be here. Heaven knows what took her abroad so early."

She went to the little table beneath the bookshelves; there lay a letter,—a letter, sealed! And the address was written in the new-fangled scratchy hand. The old lady had to take out her spectacles to read it. "To Frau von Ratenow."

She sat down, and broke the seal, slowly and with no haste, but pale to the very lips.

"Dear, Dear Aunt,—Do not think me ungrateful because I leave in secret a house in which such kindness has been shown me, such countless benefits conferred upon me during my entire life. I had no choice. I confronted you all defenceless and weary; I had only strength enough left to go. I cannot live and act a lie. I could not tell the truth,—could not speak it in words. I tried to do it yesterday, when I stood with Herr von Hegebach at my father's grave, but not a word would pass my lips. I do not know whether you understand me, aunt. I pray God you may, that you may judge me more gently.

"From D—, whither I shall turn my steps, I shall write to Herr von Hegebach. I know that his nature is too noble to allow him to refuse to release me from a promise extorted from me at a moment when my will was paralyzed and my strength exhausted by anguish.

"Farewell, dear aunt. I am, and shall always be, your grateful niece,

"ELIZABETH VON HEGEBACH.

"P.S.—I can at any time procure a situation as assistant teacher in D——. Have no anxiety for my future."

The letter fell from the old Frau's trembling hands.

"Good God! How can this be!"

Once more she held the letter before her eyes, lest she might not have read it aright; then she looked at the clock, and, as if burdened by a heavy weight, arose and went slowly to her room.

She rang the bell, and with averted face said to her maid,—

"Tell my son I beg him to come to me."

"The Herr Baron is out riding," was the reply. She went into her bedroom, and there began to gather together all that she could need upon a journey. But she was often at fault: she could not find what she wanted; nothing seemed to be

in its place. She frequently put her hand to her forehead, and then she looked for her railway guide. The first train, via Halle, left at eleven o'clock.

She rang again, and ordered the carriage, and sent to tell Johann that she wished him to be ready immediately to take a note to Bennewitz.

"Herr von Hegebach is in town. I saw his carriage early this morning," the maid timidly observed.

Was everything bewitched to-day? "Very well," she said. But anger began to stir mightily within her. This was the thanks for all her love. To run away, as in some silly romance, to reject, in inconceivable folly, everything,—everything which had, as most unhoped-for good fortune, fallen to her share, homeless as she was! She compromised the house that had sheltered her. That gentle girl with the soft brown eyes,—where had she found the strength, the determination, to do this thing? But there must be no yielding to her; that letter to the Bennewitzer must be prevented at all hazards.

She went to her writing-table and indicted a telegraph to the principal of the institute at D——, begging her to instruct Elsie von Hegebach to write nothing until she had seen Frau von Ratenow, who was coming to D—— by the night train and would want lodgings. She sent off the servant with the sealed despatch, and wrote to the Bennewitzer; he must be found,—at the hotel, at the Rathhaus, or at

the Land Office. He must not come to the castle; some reason must be invented to keep him away. Falsehood was difficult indeed for this honest, upright nature. She tore up three notes, one after another. Elsie had a headache, she wrote first; but, good heavens! he would surely learn that she had gone out. She was obliged suddenly to go upon a short journey. Pshaw! why and whither should she go? He would see that all was not as it should be. No, she could not lie, come what might. What was to be done she knew not.

"If Moritz were only here!"

"Herr von Hegebach's regards." The servant brought a bouquet of May-flowers in an exquisite holder for Fräulein von Hegebach, and a note to Frau von Ratenow.

"Take the flowers to Fräulein von Hegebach's room," said the old Frau, and then she opened her note.

It was as follows: "It is, unfortunately, impossible for me, dear madame, to fulfil my intention of dining with you to-day. I must instantly return to Bennewitz, to meet some of the directors of the M—— Railway, the new line of which may pass through a portion of my estate, as I have just heard. Excuse haste. I hope to be able to pass a couple of hours to-morrow with you and my betrothed in your pleasant home. Very faithfully, "Hermann you Hegebach."

"Thank Heaven! this is a respite." Frau von Ratenow's courage revived; she could start for D— at eleven, and could, she thought, rely upon aid there from Sister Beata. The girl must not be allowed to reject her good fortune thus. She began again hurriedly to make preparations for the journey. Dear, dear, what a work there was, and all for such a wayward girl! How she hated the railway, and she had to change cars at Halle! Oh, that dreadful bustle at Halle! Suddenly another idea occurred to her. She heard the trampling of a horse, and went to the window. Yes, it was he!

"Moritz!" she called loudly across the courtyard.

He took off his hat and nodded. "In a minute, mother."

And then he walked slowly towards the house, with his own peculiar air of good-humoured indifference, and she heard him speaking to the gardener in the hall below. At last he entered her room.

"Good heavens, my boy, how slow you are!"

"I beg pardon, mother. Were you in a hurry?"

"It is a quarter of eleven, Moritz, and—will you do me a favour, Moritz? You know how I dislike travelling: go in my stead to D——, and talk with Elsie; she has always been influenced by what you say. Have you not heard yet, Moritz, that the

little goose has run away? Or can it be-? Moritz, did you know anything about it?"

He stood perfectly calm as she poured out these hasty sentences. "Yes, mother, I saw her go."

- "Moritz! And you did not try to stop her, even by force, if necessary, from carrying out her sentimental ideas?"
- "No, mother," he replied. And he took up from the table, where he had thrown it, his riding-whip, and bent and unbent it in his hands, as stubborn as ever he had been during his boyhood. When firm in his own convictions, he was not to be swayed even by the mother whom he loved. "No; I had no right to do so."
- "Good God, Moritz!" The old lady flushed with anger.
- "No right," he repeated. "Neither you nor I, mother, have the right—and, thank God! under our laws no one has the right—to force a girl into a marriage against her will."
- "This is positively enough to drive one insane. What fine phrases are these? Who forced her when she made her decision?"
- "Everything,—people, circumstances life and death, mother. And her own heart cried out, 'No!' But no one would listen to it."
- "But why, Moritz? Can you see any reason for it? Is it not madness in her case?"
 - "Reason? Ah, mother, you need not try to dis-

cover that. What is the mysterious force that attracts us to one human being and repels us from another?"

"You speak like a sentimentalist, Moritz. Look around you in the world; open your eyes; it is daylight, broad daylight. Human life is prosaic, not idyllic,—a struggle, a pursuit; one must look to it to maintain a position here."

"And that which sets all these wheels in motion, mother, is love, and you cannot banish it from the world by denying it, at whatever cost. Love and fidelity,—we Germans have them in the blood, mother." And he nodded his head gravely. "I cannot describe them to you; that needs finer words than I have at command.

"Love!" The old lady stood erect. "Love!" she repeated. "Do you mean that insignificant lieutenant? What is he, compared with the Bennewitzer? A nonentity. He makes a graceful bow and plays a little on the fiddle,—voilà tout."

"I know him only as an attractive man," Moritz insisted; "but what of that, mother? That, too, is a mystery. Love has nothing to do with externals, with position or attractiveness. But 'a nonentity,' mother——? Be frank; confess, how would it be if Bernardi were, for example, the Bennewitzer's son?"

"Then it would be entirely different, my boy. Let us have done with this sentimental fiddle-faddle. Will you go in my place?" she asked, categorically. "Will you represent everything once more to Elsie? For—stuff and nonsense!—she cannot marry her Bernardi. He consoled himself long ago."

"As regards one thing, I grant you are right, mother,—he cannot marry her, presumably not. That he has forgotten her I am not sure. I hardly think so, for Rost's servant, commissioned by Bernardi, early this morning laid a most beautiful wreath upon Hegebach's grave. Go to Elsie?—No, mother. I have told you what I think. I shall not try to persuade the child."

"Well, then, I shall go myself."

"Do not, mother dear. It is not right."

"Shall I give her reason to reproach me when she comes to be a nervous old governess?" she rejoined. "I am doing my duty. Enough!"

"It is useless, mother, especially in her present agitated condition."

"Heaven helps those who help themselves," she said. "You are the same dreamer that you always were!" And she went into her bedroom.

CHAPTER XV.

A REFUGE.

It was the same road by which she had come home, along which the express train was now bearing her with lightning rapidity. But then it had been amid the mists of autumn, and she had sped along in the evening, her heart filled with blissful anticipations. Now it was a morning in spring, and the sun shone pitilessly bright upon the opposite cushions in the railway-carriage, revealing every worn, shabby spot. The little mirror in its gilt frame showed her a pale face with weary lines about the mouth, and that was she, Elsie von Hege-She leaned back against the cushions as if exhausted, her eyes fixed constantly upon the fleeting landscape. She did not see the outside world, glorious with the promise of budding spring, the youthful soul within her was so fearfully dreary and empty.

She had burned her ships behind her; she had no one now, not one human being who understood her,—nothing, nothing! Even Aunt Lott had written in a half-sentimental, half-congratulatory style, speaking of the great happiness that had come to

her on the verge of the grave as it were, in that such a lot had fallen to her beloved one's share! Happiness! Did they call that happiness? What was it? To bear a man's name, to share his worldly possessions, to have no need of care for the thousand material necessities of existence. This they called happiness! And for this she must give up everything,—her freedom, her thoughts, her hopes, her very self, body and soul! A nervous shudder possessed her: she closed her eyes. "Never! never!" she said, so loud that she started at the sound of her own voice, and an old lady sitting opposite her looked at her in surprise.

She had cast down her eyes: she did not notice the old lady's look,—she saw before her only a crimson glow, and in this glow, now near and now retreating into the distance, the semblance of a man's head, with dark curls and melancholy eyes, and a black moustache on the upper lip, and through the rushing of the train she heard sleighbells, and around her breathed an odour of violets; and yet he had turned from her, he had forsaken her, because she was a penniless girl.

Suddenly she started.

"My child, are you ill?" a compassionate voice asked, and above her bent the old lady's kind face.

"No, no, thank you," she replied, hastily, blushing crimson. "I did not sleep last night, and——"

"Excuse me,—you moaned so sadly, my dear."

And the lady sat down again, and opened a box she had with her. It was filled with fresh violets. "My grandchildren plucked these for me; may I offer you some?" And she held out the flowers to the young girl.

A little hand took them gratefully, but words of thanks would not come. The giver saw the black veil hurriedly drawn down over the face and beneath it the violets pressed to the eyes. In a few minutes she thought she heard low sobs sounding strangely, as if from tearless weeping. "Such grief in one so young!" she thought, and turned and looked out of the window.

At the railway-stations all was bustle and confusion; sometimes the carriage would be filled for a short time, and then again it would be nearly empty. Finally the old lady got out, and as the train moved slowly off she stood for a time on the platform looking after it. She would have liked to see the pathetic, childlike face once more; but it was of no use,—the girl sat leaning back, motionless as before, against the cushions.

And then came the station next to the last, and then,—then her journey's end. Elsie suddenly found herself upon the familiar platform, in, as it seemed to her, a dream. Opposite her the mountains of the Thuringian forest reared their blue summits to the heavens, as she had seen them so many hundred times. Ah, those beautiful woods, that wide-

spreading, huge, lonely forest! How joyously she had wandered there! And just before her lay the clean, empty street, with its picturesque old houses, where quantities of flowers were blooming behind all the shining window-panes; and beyond, the dear old church, with its green, shady church-yard, all unchanged; she only, she only!

She walked quickly down the street, past the long hedge and through the garden of the Institute. Not a person was to be seen, thank Heaven! They were at work,—it was during school-hours. The narrow, exquisitely white stairs creaked softly as the girl ascended them. How familiar the sound was to her ear! And hark! the canary-bird, little yellow Hans, was singing shrilly in Sister Beata's small study.

She knocked, and then, in her black mourning dress, and with her dark veil drawn down over her pale face, passed slowly across the threshold of the tiny room.

"Elizabeth?" asked a deep, calm voice. "Is it really thou, Elizabeth?"

And a little old woman in the habit of the Moravian Sisters approached her, and a pair of eyes inexpressibly gentle in their gaze looked into her melancholy face.

"Sister Beata!" she tried to say, but she could not; she could only clasp her arms about the dear old neck, while all the torture of what she had gone through found vent in a convulsive burst of tears.

"Thou art in mourning, my poor child?"

"My father," she stammered.

The little Moravian pressed her hand gently and led her to the old-fashioned sofa. "First calm thyself, Elizabeth, and then we will talk. Come, have a cup of coffee. I knew thou wert coming; a despatch has arrived."

"From whom?" The girl looked at the speaker in dismay. "What do they want? What does the telegraph say?" she added, hastily.

"They wish me to prevent thee from writing a letter, my child; and then—thy aunt will be here this evening."

Elsie sat mute and trembling. "They will not let me alone," she sobbed forth at last. "Sister Beata, help me not to be base,—as base as a girl can be. Save me,—save me from ruin!"

"Elizabeth, thou art beside thyself!" said the Sister's grave, warning voice.

Elsie was silent, and the hands that she had involuntarily wrung dropped nerveless into her lap. She gazed searchingly into the passionless face before her.

"Sister Beata," she began, in an entirely changed voice, "when I left here you promised me that I should always find a refuge with you; you said you could always find sufficient occupation for

me in your institution. I have come to-day to remind you of that promise, to take you at your word."

"Thou comest at a very fortunate time, dear Elizabeth. Sister Angelika's position in the fourth class-room is vacant."

With these words the speaker offered the girl a plate of inviting Moravian cake.

She declined to take any. "Where is Sister . Angelika?" she asked.

"Gone away to Africa. Elizabeth, thou oughtest to eat something: thou art evidently exhausted."

"To Africa? As a missionary?"

"Yes,—she goes to assist her husband, who is to keep school in Natal. The lot fell to her, and so she has gone. She left us three weeks ago."

It all sounded so calm; it was said as simply as though Sister Angelika had gone to church in some neighbouring village. Elsie knew her well,—a fair, delicate girl,—and she knew, also, that the community was wont to marry its daughters by lot. She had never reflected upon this before; now it shocked her like something unworthy of humanity.

"And she went willingly, Sister Beata?" she asked, putting up her hands to her throbbing temples.

"Willingly? That lay between herself and her

Maker alone; but she knew that it was His will, and she went gladly."

There was silence in the little room. Its atmosphere seemed to the girl oppressively heavy. Sister Beata seated herself at the table by the window, behind a pile of exercise-books, and began to correct them. As she did so, she said, "Thou hast need to rest awhile, Elizabeth; thou art very pale, and, to judge by thy looks, very weary."

The girl shook her head, and, going up to her, laid her hand upon her shoulder. "Sister Beata," she began, and her voice trembled, "you once told me, and that not very long ago, that truth was the only thing that could save us in our need and wretchedness,—that it was the first of all the virtues."

The delicate feminine head, crowned by the snowy cap, nodded in assent, without looking up. "Certainly, dear Elizabeth; thou wast always a good and honest child, according to our human judgment."

"What I am going to ask you sounds strange, Sister Beata. But tell me, there was no other image filling Angelika's heart?—she did not carry a lie to the altar?"

Now the placid Moravian looked up. "No, Elizabeth, her heart was an unwritten page. We live a quiet, retired life here; the passions that torture and sway foolish human hearts in the world outside these walls do not cross this threshold; we know them only from hearsay. Thou knowest this, Elizabeth; wherefore, then, thy question?"

The girl suddenly threw herself upon her knees before her, and hid her face in the folds of her gray woollen gown. "I wish I had never gone away from you! I wish I had never seen him!" she sobbed.

"Stand up, Elizabeth, and compose thyself."

The Moravian tenderly and compassionately stroked back the girl's hair.

"Help me, Sister Beata!" Elsie implored once more, gazing up with streaming eyes into the kind face; "help me not to become base and to lie! Tell my aunt that I must write to him and tell the truth at all hazards."

"To him, Elizabeth?"

"Yes,—to the one whom they have for three days called my betrothed."

To this Sister Beata made no reply.

"Thou wast always my darling, Elizabeth," she said, after a pause, "but canst thou be content here? Reflect: it is not so easy, after a glimpse of the gay world outside, to settle down quietly here as a teacher, with nothing before thy eyes but duty and the hand of the clock that portions out thy hours. Years ago a dear pupil returned hither, weary of the world and sick at heart, and begged me to keep her forever,—forever. At first all went well: she worked hard, that she might forget sad

thoughts: the repose and regularity of this place did her shattered nerves good. But time passed on and healed her wounded heart, and health returned and lured her back to the fresh, gay life outside. She longed for it daily more and more, and at last she said, 'I am going, Sister Beata; I must go. Here you creep, and there they fly.' And she went. I do not know what became of her. I tell thee this to explain to thee that this is no place to come only to be healed of the wounds which the world has made. If thou acceptest Sister Angelika's position, Elizabeth, thou bindest thyself for at least two years. Take this well into consideration."

The girl was still on her knees, and a thousand thoughts began to career wildly through her brain; before her closed eyes floated charming airy toilettes, lovely flowers, gay colours, upon her ear fell the notes of delicious music rising and falling melodiously, and the sound of laughter and song,—that was life!—that was youth! And like some colourless picture there suddenly arose before her the school-room with its bare walls, where life rolled on monotonously,—and she was so young! The Sister's last words weighed upon her soul like lead.

Hark! from an adjoining apartment there echoed through the quiet room a note long drawn and deliciously sweet; some one in there began to play the violin,—the violin! She burst into fresh sobs, and clasped her hands about the fair head still reposing upon Sister Beata's lap. There were thorns to the crimson roses,—cruel thorns!

"I have nothing any longer beyond these walls, Sister Beata," she stammered. "I will stay with you."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TEASING, KINDLY FAIRY.

THERE were certain rooms in the Institute where guests were received and lodged. The accommodations at the village inn were very primitive, and from time to time some mother in passing the place would wish to pay her daughter a visit. One of these rooms was opened for Elsie, and the one next it, the finest of the very modest apartments, was arranged for Frau von Ratenow.

The train was expected at nine o'clock, and the principal herself went to the railway-station to receive the stern relative. Elsie, meanwhile, sat in her little room, watching in indescribable anxiety the hurrying clouds, that now concealed and now half revealed the moon, which in return for such dallying tinged their outlines with silver. What was going to happen? Sister Beata had heard all the details of her story now, and she saw clearly that the poor child had had no choice. She knew Frau von Ratenow well enough from the decided, resolute tone of her letters to foresee with certainty a hard conflict.

According to Elsie's calculation, they must have

already returned from the station. They were now, doubtless, sitting in Sister Beata's pleasant little room, holding in their hands the threads of her future fate, and arguing about what was called her happiness.

"Elsie! Elsie!" called a low voice outside her door, "are you here, or not?"

She started as the door opened, and her eyes, accustomed to the darkness, perceived upon the threshold a short, girlish figure in a travelling-costume with a coquettish little hat crowning dark curls.

"Lili!" she exclaimed, in amazement.

"Well, yes,—good heavens! it is I," was the rejoinder. "I imagined I should find you, just as I do find you, of course, gazing at the moon. Of course,

"Thou, moon, art happier than I,—
Thou seest him whom I may not see,"

she declaimed, tossing off her hat. "Good gracious! is there no sofa here? I am tired to death. Oh, Elsie! it was a desperate idea of yours to take to flight."

"You came with Aunt Ratenow, Lili? She—has she come?"

"She certainly has." The graceful little creature threw herself upon the white bed and stretched herself to her heart's content. "All the same she would have been sitting in state at Halle at this moment but for me. Moritz knew that very well, or he surely would have spared me this journey. The entire railway-carriage filled with mothers and nurses and babies, and in the midst of them, upright as an Indian pagoda, Aunt Ratenow on your trail, and I—Oh, Elsie! why did you do me such an ill turn? There is a supper at the Cramms' tonight, and I do so like stewed crabs with asparagus!"

Elsie made no reply; she sat down beside the bed upon which Lili was lying, and gazed anxiously into the face in which the large, bright eyes sparkled gleefully in spite of her complaints.

"Do you know, Elsie, that you really take great pains to provide the town with most interesting gossip?" the little lady went on. "I must confess that when Moritz, this morning, brought us the astounding news of your flight, and at the same time ordered me on duty to accompany Aunt Ratenow in pursuit of the fugitive, I had no wish in the world except to dine to-day at the officers' mess. Their wine-merchant will make a deal of money, for men drink glass after glass of wine without knowing it when they are excited. And Rost will draw a touching picture of you as a nun behind the grating in the convent parlour, and the Bennewitzer kneeling before it wringing his hands, in a nodding plume, and a breastplate, and with his sword by his side, and underneath the picture will be,

'Knight, to love thee like a sister, vows this heart to thee.' Really it sounds quite modern, the old German. I should dearly like to know how such an idea as this got into your head, my sweet child."

She received no answer; Elsie had withdrawn to the window.

"I cannot understand you," the little chatterbox began again. "I think marrying the Bennewitzer would be wonderfully chic. I assure you that if he had asked me-Yes, and thank you; although I, too, have here"-she put her hand on her heart-"a long-cherished love. One must have it, Elsie, else whom could one think of when reading verses, -Geibel, for example, or Strachwitz? Oh, it's positively indispensable for that! But all the same I would have married the Bennewitzer. How delightful to have him see us afterwards fettered to another! It would make him feel quite Heine-ish: 'Oh, love forever lost,—I'll not complain!' One need not be wretched very long,-only poets are that; but 'tis interesting, Elsie, excessively interesting! Elsie, don't be vexed with me," was whispered caressingly into the girl's ear, and two soft arms clasped her round. "I am not so bad as I seem, and if you'll promise me not to cry any more-do you think I don't see that you have nearly cried your beautiful eyes out, like the girl in the fairy-story? -I'll tell you something that will delight you tremendously."

- "Nothing delights me now, Lili," was the mournful reply, as the girl's forehead was pressed against the window-pane.
- "I have seen him, Elsie," was whispered still more softly,—" in the flesh,—as large as life!"
- "My—my cousin?" the poor girl moaned. It was terrible to have to hear how he had received the blow dealt by her hand. She saw him so distinctly before her as he had stood with her at her father's grave and had looked at her so kindly and compassionately. She had lifted her hand then to strike this blow, but it had dropped again powerless.
- "The Bennewitzer?-the poor, rejected Toggenburg? I don't mean him," Lili went on, clasping the trembling form closer. "We girls call the one-the one only-him. Nonsense, Elsie! don't pretend to be such a child. You are nineteen years old, and you have been to boarding-school. But then"-she laughed softly-"it was with the Moravians. I always forget that. You never learn anything naughty there; their scholars are all little freshly-washed angels of innocence until they are eighteen. I went to G-, and our school-room looked out upon the court-yard of the club-house, and every one of us called some one there 'him.' Well, I saw him in Halle. Elsie, do you understand? He had his violin-case in his hand, and he was dressed in citizen's clothes,-well, not so very

fashionably, but that is of small consequence with an officer. It is better in a large city; he might, for example, drive an omnibus in that dress without attracting notice by his elegance. Well, Elsie, what do you say?"

Elsie did not move or speak.

"And I spoke to him,-don't be so startled, my dear,-Aunt Ratenow did not see me: she was conferring with a porter at the other end of the plat-I was buying the tickets; he was standing in the crowd. He certainly is very handsome, Elsie. My acquaintance with him was too slight to warrant my addressing him,-I had only danced with him once or twice,-but there are fifty ways. I accidentally dropped my umbrella as I passed him; of course he picked it up. 'Oh, a thousand thanks, Lieutenant Bernardi!' He started. 'I am in a great hurry,' I said, and mentioned my name, 'Lili Teesfeld. I am going to D- with Aunt Ratenow to bring back Elsie Hegebach, who is determined, apparently, to go into a convent.' Oh, you ought to have seen his face! 'Yes, yes, a convent,' I went on, 'because she will not marry her cousin. Good-by, lieutenant.' So I left him standing there, and heroically made my way through the terrible crowd; but just as I was going to get into the railway-carriage there he was, getting into the one just behind us. By good luck, Aunt Ratenow took her seat at the other window. I had to put my head out of mine frequently to get fresh air, and he had to put his out for the same reason at all the stations. Aunt Ratenow once looked across the nurses and babies, and asked, 'Are you talking to any one, Lili?' Whereupon I looked at her with a face of such reproachful surprise—Well, in short, he knows everything, and—I am to be kind, very kind, and very tender to you. He told me that, just before I left the train: he went on farther. And when I tell you that he sent a wreath for your father's grave, and that he is going home now on leave, I have told you everything."

Elsie wept no more. A brightly-gleaming veil seemed to fall around her. She opened the window, and, leaning out, looked down into the budding garden flooded with silver light; a nightingale in the old linden-tree burst into delicious melody; her heart throbbed as though it would break. He remembered her, he had talked of her on this the most miserable day of her young life. Ah, it was too much—too much happiness!

And then she drew back, shut the window hastily, and buried her face in her hands. Of what avail was it? She was only a penniless girl!

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL IN VAIN.

The little Moravian Sister sat opposite the stately old lady in the simple apartment. They were both flushed; they could not agree. Frau von Ratenow had thought to find auxiliary troops here, and had encountered, if not an enemy, at least a force which seemed resolved to remain perfectly neutral, and which, while admitting the justice of much that the old Frau advanced in her decided fashion, yet had much to put forward in Elsie's favour. This placid little woman talked like Moritz in person, although her speech was a trifle more unctional than his.

"There is no need to talk further, my dear Sister Beata," the old Frau at last interrupted the Sister's gentle discourse. "I see plainly that we do not understand each other. You may be right from your point of view, and you evidently cannot judge of my position or of that of the child. You pursue here an eternal round of simple interests; we live in the world, and the world demands its rights,—even of Elsie."

"But at the cost of a peace of mind that is beyond reason," was the reply. Frau von Ratenow arose. "I should like to go to bed," she said. "I hope that at least you will do nothing to oppose my intention. Elsie must go home with me to-morrow,—she must."

"Certainly, Frau Baroness; Elsie shall decide for herself."

"I think I shall be able to bring the stubborn child to her senses," the old Frau added. "But tell me, my dear, have you a physician and an apothecary in the village?"

"Certainly; art thou not well, Frau Baroness?"

"Oh, it will amount to nothing. I wanted to know in case—— Sometimes I have a twinge that makes me helpless for a time, and there was a terrible draught in the railway-carriage. But we will hope for the best."

"But let me get thee some simple little liniment."

"Not yet, my dear. If I need it. I have no confidence, after all, in drugs. At home I never let a doctor come near me. They are all not much better than my old shepherd, who can conjure and pray and charm away ailments. You need not look so amazed, my dear; 'tis true. I will not see Elsie to-night; I have had excitement enough for to-day. Tell her to come to my room to-morrow morning. The other little one is with her, I suppose? Well, then, good-night."

As they spoke, they came to the guest-chamber prepared for the old Frau, who entered it, and,

without more ado, closed the door in the face of the little Moravian. Sister Beata heard her groan once or twice, as if she were in some pain and were stretching herself. She shook her head and went to the next room.

Here Fräulein Lili had taken her place at the table between the windows, and was eating bread and butter and omelette, and drinking a glass of milk, with the appetite and relish that belong to youth. Elsie sat beside her, her eyes red with weeping, taking no share in the repast, and gazing at the tiny insects that persistently singed their wings in the flame of the candle. Lili's elastic little figure started up from the seat when Sister Beata entered, and courtesied to the simple little Moravian as if she had been a princess of the blood royal.

"I came to wish the ladies a good-night," said the latter. "Elizabeth, thy aunt wishes to speak with thee to-morrow morning; she hopes thou wilt accompany her home. I wish to impress upon thee once more to consider thy decision prayerfully. Good-night, my dear children. God protect you!"

Lili stared after her as she left the room, and then turned to Elsie, who looked sadder than before. "Elsie, is it true?—is there a kind of biscuit here called 'brother and sister hearts,' and, when the dough is extra good, 'united brother and sister hearts'?" She sat down, and went on eating with

a relish. "Please, please let me have a couple to-morrow morning with my coffee,—the 'united' ones,—it has just occurred to me."

A smile hovered over Elsie's pale, melancholy face.

"Lili, you are incorrigible!"

"Ah, thank Heaven!" exclaimed the versatile little creature, "you can still laugh. Ah, Elsie, Elsie,"—she kneeled down before the girl,—"you are all such pious people, and yet you have not a particle of cheerful trust in God! But I know that all will be well with you,—I know it for certain!"

"You know it?" asked Elsie.

" Yes."

"How, then?"

"That I cannot explain. It is in the air,—in the air of spring, perhaps, and in the budding and blossoming outside; the birds sing it, and the water murmurs it. Come, poor heart, forget your woe; everything will turn out well."

Elsie shook her head, and looked into the fresh face of the girl, whose dark eyes were swimming in tears.

"You wonder at me, Elsie? I have always seemed to you so superficial? I tell you frankly I did not take much interest in you, you were so fearfully tiresome in your dreary musing over the loved and lost, and so forth; you were so terribly passive.

But when I saw you wan and pale in spite of what they all lauded to the skies and called your wonderful good fortune, I pitied you; and when you ran away yesterday, you suddenly took captive all my heart, Elsie. That was something to do, Elsie,—not every one could have done it; hundreds of girls would quietly have let the net be drawn tight about them and would have become Frau von Hegebach. But now rely upon me, Elsie; I will help you, and Moritz will help you, and even Frieda is not so angry with you now."

"Was she ever so?" Elsie asked, in amazement.

"Why, child," Lili exclaimed, "where were your eyes? Angry? She was raging—raging with jealousy of you—if Moritz even mentioned your name. The poor fellow had a hard time of it."

Elsie's face glowed crimson. In a flash the behaviour of the young wife, hitherto such an enigma to her, was explained, and so was Moritz's avoidance of her. She moaned sadly, "That, too?"

"Calm yourself, my dear; there was a touching reconciliation scene yesterday between the pair. Frieda cried like a school-girl, and Moritz asked, 'Do you not see now, Frieda, how foolish you have been?' And she said peccavi so gently, I never would have believed it of her. And, Elsie dear, you will come back with us to-morrow?—you will not stay here? It must be terribly tiresome among all these united brother and sister hearts. You

see I know the turn matters will take: the Bennewitzer will suspect something, and, when he asks Moritz, Moritz will tell him the whole truth, and then there will be no more idea of the betrothal. Come with us, Elsie, dear Elsie!"

"No," the girl said, rising,—"never! I cannot."

Lili was about to reply, when some heavy object came banging against the door into the next room.

"Old people need sleep!" Frau von Ratenow called, in a voice of thunder. "Stop chattering! I am tired to death."

Elsie went to bed in silence. Lili had a paroxysm of stifled laughter; Aunt Ratenow was a source of never-ending amusement to her.

In the night she arose,—the moon was shining brightly into the room, and from the other bed she thought she heard a sob. She touched the soft fair hair scattered across the white pillows. "Elsie, Elsie, are you crying?" she asked, in a whisper. Then all was still.

Just after Frau von Ratenow awoke the next morning a letter arrived for her by express. Sister Beata herself brought it to her.

"Mercy upon us! it is the Bennewitzer's handwriting!" How did he know that she was here? And, good heavens! she was hardly able to move; with difficulty she sat upright in bed. "My spectacles, please, Sister Beata. I can scarcely stir." The little Moravian handed her what she asked for, and left her alone. All was still in the room; the rustling of the paper in the old lady's hand was audible.

There were but a few lines to read, but they made the face of the reader very pale. She put her hand up to her eyes, and felt suddenly dizzy. All in vain,—everything at an end!

"Lili," she called, her voice sounding like a moan. The young girl came quickly, still in her peignoir, with her hair unbound. "Give that to Elsie, and then finish dressing yourself."

"Are you going back immediately, aunt? Shall I tell Elsie?"

"Elsie!" She sat upright among the pillows. "What is Elsie to me?" she exclaimed, loudly. "They who sow the whirlwind will reap the storm. I hate, from the bottom of my soul, ingratitude and obstinacy!"

"Aunt!" Lili exclaimed, terrified by the expression of the old lady's face.

"Go!" she cried. "We shall leave here in an hour."

The trembling girl went back to Elsie, who was just arranging her fair braids. "Read this," she said. "Oh, good heavens! aunt is so angry,—so angry!"

The heavy braids dropped from the little hands that took the paper.

"Dear Madame,—In great haste—this must go by the express-train,—I beg you, in my name, to give back her freedom to my cousin. Further communication by word of mouth, shortly.

"Faithfully yours,
"H. von Hegebach."

For an instant the girl's chest heaved as if relieved of an intolerable weight. Then she covered her face with her hands and shuddered. "Elsie! Elsie!" Lili exclaimed, clasping her in her arms, but she extricated herself, and went to the door of Frau von Ratenow's room. It was locked.

"Is that you, Lili?" asked the old lady.

"No, it is Elsie, aunt," she called, in a tone of entreaty.

All was silent within the room.

"Aunt!" the girl sobbed.

Again no answer,—only the sound of hasty steps, and preparations for departure.

"Aunt, only one word." She pulled and rattled at the door in desperation. In vain. She turned away, stood for one moment motionless, her eyes gazing from the window, then looked at Lili and seemed to try to smile; but the tears rushed to her eyes. A sense of utter forlornness overwhelmed her. She had no one now, no one in the world.

An hour later, Frau von Ratenow, on Lili's arm, was slowly and painfully pacing to and fro on the

platform of the railway-station, waiting for the train. The old lady was in pain, as was to be seen in the tightly-compressed lips. She felt ill; she would have liked to weep if she had known how. She could remember weeping but once in her life,-not when she laid her husband in the grave, but when she took a little crying infant in her arms away from its dead mother. 'But no, there never was such a thing as gratitude in the world.' And she began to complain of the train, which was behind time,-of a porter, who stared at her,-of the miserable coffee at the Institute,-and of her aching head. And Lili walked silently beside her, with a sad face and eyes red with crying, which sheturned continually towards a pointed gable showing above the tender green of the trees, as if a window must open over there and a girl's head look from it with longing eyes.

'I've nothing, no, nothing, to have or to keep, Except my two brown eyes, with which I can weep.'

The words which Elsie used to sing,—Lili could not banish them from her mind to-day. And then came the train.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IDLE DREAMS.

A WEEK later a gentleman sat in one of the carriages of the express-train as it rushed past the lonely little Moravian village. It did not stop there, but the young man gazed after it from the window, as if it were the loveliest spot in all the green land of Thuringia, through which he was being borne so swiftly. Then he leaned back in his seat, pushed aside a violin-case, and took from his breast-pocket a letter, which he began to read:

"MY DEAR BERNARDI,—You have demanded a letter or my life; and, although I detest writing letters, especially those sentimental in tendency, I will try to satisfy your demands and help you to some peace of mind.

"In fact, however, I have nothing very consoling to tell you. I confess that even my stony old heart is not quite comfortable when I remember the evening of a certain ball, during which I felt myself called upon to give you a little sensible advice.

"Yes, it is absolutely the fact. Little Elsie von Hegebach, early one morning last week, left her warm nest in the castle, the most careful of aunts, and a paternal futur, that she might, in the peace and quiet of a Moravian sisterhood, weep and bewail-what I do not know,-perhaps you do. All sensible people-and you know how many of these our walls have the privilege of enclosing-shrug their shoulders and smile. It is so terribly out of fashion nowadays to run away from a wealthy suitor. The romance of life usually begins after that little ceremony before the altar, and is all the more piquant. The girl's decided action, however, has drawn down upon her the supreme displeasure of old Frau von Ratenow, who, from her practical point of view, is quite justified in entertaining doubts of her foster-child's sanity. She returned from her journey in pursuit of the fugitive very ill, and had to be carried from her carriage to her bed. Even to-day I hear she is very little better.

"I need not tell you that 'society' in our little town, especially the feminine portion of it, finds enough to occupy its tongue in all this; and perhaps you surmise that, as is the fact, the name of Bernardi is frequently mentioned, and, unfortunately, with reason. 'This it is that burns my brain,' says the poet. For what is to be done? Such a pity for that pretty girl! But, in the name of Heaven, who is to blame? It is not your fault,

nor is it her fault. It is money, money, or rather the want of it, that is at the bottom of it all. Why are you not a baron of the empire with half a dozen estates? Why does man need so much to sustain his miserable existence? Yes, why? I will stop asking; I am positively growing sentimental. I cannot banish from my thoughts the little girl with the pathetic brown eyes. You should have seen her the day of the funeral.

"Do not suppose that I repent having told you the truth,—certainly not; it was my duty. She will, it is to be hoped, forget, although not so easily as some others. And do not you hang your head; you cannot help her; we are the slaves of circumstances. Farewell, Bernardi. Yours,

" VON ROST."

How often, how often it had been read! The young man put it away again in his pocket-book and gazed from the window, as if to to find there the answer to the 'why?' of his friend. Numberless plans chased one another through the young man's brain. He could have gnashed his teeth in impotent rage,—'the slave of circumstances'!

The train whisked past a station-house on the edge of the forest, in the spring sunshine, in the shade of birch-trees just bursting into leaf. A young woman sat on the door-step with a child in her lap; her husband stood at the gate and saluted,

while his wife looked smilingly after the long train Suddenly the young traveller was possessed by bitter envy. The children of the people can love, and marry, and be happy: if they have nothing to eat, they starve together, as they labour together. And why not? Elsie, too, would have laboured and starved with him; he had read it in her dear eves. The children of the upper class drag about after them the heavy train of the obligations of rank, patched together out of a thousand bits of stuff into a magnificent garment, which seems to the wealthy most luxurious and comfortable, while it so oppresses and weighs down the high-born poor that they can with difficulty keep it on their shoulders, although they dare not show themselves anywhere without it. Oh, no! much grief and misery, how much hope deferred, how much self-sacrifice it covers!

All this is so necessary that without this garment society is quite inconceivable; this it would be ridiculous to deny. And, after all, the many carry it off easily. The few who stifle beneath it,—well, they must stifle, or finally get used to it. Elsie will forget, and for himself—there may, perhaps, be war soon.

"Elsie will not forget," a voice within declared. "Elsie will grieve away her youth, and that sunny, charming creature will grow to be a lonely, bitter old maid." And he went on feverishly pursuing

his wonted train of thought. What should he do? Should he give up the army and try some other profession?

Suddenly Frau von Ratenow's image confronted him, and the diamond in her ring gleamed through the dim room, as on that evening. 'Do you think that in any profession people live upon air? Do you suppose that when you have laid aside your uniform you can live like a day-labourer?'

Then he went on to speculate as he had done countless times before. A merchant?—with no capital? A farmer?—to be nothing but a superintendent while life lasts? An artist?—to join the crowd who never attain anything save mediocrity, and who live in perpetual depression because they feel that they never can reach their ideal? It all sounded cruel enough, but it was true.

He would rather resign and cross the sea; but then there were his old father and mother, who had pinched themselves and saved every penny that he might fulfil his ardent wish to become a soldier.

Good-by to all his dreams. Farewell, Elsie! 'the slave of circumstances,'—what can a slave do? "He has come back gloomier than he went away," said his comrades, as they walked along the street chatting, the next day after drill, on the way to their quarters. "Silly fellow! he is still cling-

ing to his blighted hopes," one added, smiling;

"inconceivable nowadays."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BENNEWITZER'S SCHEME.

AUTUMN had come again. The wind was scattering the leaves in the garden of the castle, and the grapes on the wild vine wreathing the balustrade of the terrace had turned purple. A small wood fire flickered upon the hearth in Frau von Ratenow's room, and its occupant sat, upright as ever, in her old seat by the window, knitting, and looking out over the court-yard. Her face was not so full as formerly: she had altered; her long illness in the spring had not passed away without leaving traces behind it. She had recovered slowly, very slowly, and in the summer she had spent some time at Baden-Baden, wishing herself at home all the while. Frieda and Lili, who went with her.-Moritz had stayed at home,-had been delighted to make a fresh toilette three times a day, and to go on excursions, and to take walks with newly-made acquaintances. She was content to sit alone in the garden before the house, where she could neither hear nor see anything of the senseless bustle and confusion.

It was better at home. Aunt Lott was there 244

again,—and she had learned to speak her mind very boldly whenever the subject of Elsie was introduced. And she was indefatigable in always reverting to this theme.

"You must admit now, Lott, that I was right; the child in her wicked waywardness threw away her happiness."

"Yes, my dear Ratenow, but-"

"But? I can't see any 'but' in the case. As she has made her bed she must lie in it. Think of compromising herself, and all of us, in such a way!"

"My dear Ratenow, how can you speak so?" Aunt Lott would say, indignantly. "How can you refuse to read her letters? She writes so that I can't look at them without tears in my eyes."

Then there would be no answer, and the conversation would be over for a day or two, when it would be begun all over again and ended in the same manner.

Aunt Lott corresponded very diligently with her poor darling. She told her every detail of life at the castle, and conscientiously delivered every message of affection sent by Elsie. One wish of the girl, however, she could not fulfil,—she could not extort for her one kind word from Aunt Ratenow. And whether the Bennewitzer too was not excessively angry with Elsie she could not discover with any certainty.

The Bennewitzer was perfectly impenetrable. He came as he had been wont to do, to visit Frau von Ratenow, and of late they had been playing chess together. He calmly smoked the cigars she offered him, and once astounded the old lady by informing her that he now often sat at home in a dressing-gown and with a long pipe, like a veritable grandfather.

"But, my dear Hegebach!" Frau von Ratenow looked at him incredulously; in her eyes he was still young and handsome, although as he sat opposite her she could not but perceive that his hair was very gray on his temples. He never asked after Elsie. But when Aunt Lott, at Elsie's request, now and then visited the graves of the girl's parents, she always found them covered with fresh flowers, and the sexton's wife informed her that it was by the orders of the Bennewitzer gentleman. Aunt Lott had been quite glad to hear this, and once had taken occasion to thank him.

"For what?" he had asked. "They are my relatives."

Otherwise, everything was the same as formerly at the castle. Frieda had a governess for the children, and delighted in society and in dancing, as she had done during the previous year. Moritz played whist and had his talks with his mother. The apple of discord had vanished from the house. The light girlish tread was no longer heard on the stairs.

It had been pretty to see her go down the broad staircase,-it was gliding or flying rather than walking,—the graceful figure was at the foot one hardly knew how. She no longer sang her simple songs in the drawing-room or played hide-and-seek with the children in the deep recesses of the windows. All felt that something was wanting among them, something fair and lovely, but no one spoke of this. Sometimes in the twilight Aunt Lott would fancy that the door must open to admit the slender figure who would call in the clear, sweet voice, "Aunt Lott! dearest Aunt Lott!" And sometimes Frau von Ratenow would start, when she too seemed to hear a voice imploring, "Aunt, only one word, one word!" and her heart would throb with emotion that was half anger, half sorrow.

No, if it were still possible to do anything with the girl it must be done by severity. The Bennewitzer was certainly of this opinion also. She might yet become docile in that melancholy habitation.

To-day all was quiet at the castle. Frieda and Lili had paid a visit to the old lady to display themselves in rich, rustling silks and satin, in flowers and lace, in all the splendour of full dress, both attired alike in blue and silver, even to their pretty little boots. They had bouquets nearly as large as carriage-wheels in their hands, and the yellowish Gloire de Dijon decked their dark hair and formed their bouquets de corsage.

Annie Cramm was to be married to-day.

The marriage was to take place at three o'clock, and there was to be a collation at four, and the whole town was agog to witness the ceremony, to see the bridal train enter the church, where Aunt Lott had been sitting since half-past one that she might secure a good place.

Old Frau von Ratenow was entirely alone. Her thoughts were busy with the couple that were just being married, and with what a poor makeshift of a wife Annie Cramm was, however she might be loaded with lace and brocade. It was all such a commonplace arrangement,-a marriage without any point of interest. Well, they wanted nothing better, and their lives would be thoroughly comfortable,—perfectly free from care at least. then her thoughts flew to Elsie; she saw the girl beside Bernardi, she heard her laughter, and involuntarily her fancy transferred them to the place of the couple who were at that moment probably taking their seats at the head of the richly-spread table. And suddenly she imagined this table in her own dining-hall, and she herself sat opposite the handsome pair, and-

"What nonsense!" She cleared her throat loudly and began to knit. But the picture was so charming it would not be banished. Can there be anything more beautiful than such a pair of young people devoted to each other heart and soul?

"Yes, yes, Elsie was far superior to Annie Cramm,—but she had no money. Nonsense! One must conform one's self to circumstances."

Twilight gradually came on. A carriage rolled into the court-yard.

- "The Bennewitzer? I thought he was at the Cramms'." In an instant he appeared and had kissed her hand.
 - "What now?" she asked. "Is it all over?"
- "Oh, not at all, dear madame," he said, drawing his chair quite close to her seat by the window. "I only wanted to talk to you, to open my heart to you."

She listened eagerly. At last he was going to speak! Ah! she could forgive Elsie; she could—good heavens!—perhaps—— She scarcely dared to follow out the train of thought.

- "The dinner was admirable, and the wine exquisite. One must admit that the old Councillor has taste. The bridegroom, however, is a very remarkable man, very, for so young a husband. At dessert he left his bride and came and sat by me."
- "Certainly very remarkable," the old lady assented.
- "Was it not? But he really talks well. His views are sensible, and he seems practical."
- "He has shown that to-day," Frau von Ratenow remarked, dryly.

"What? Ah, yes, yes! chacun à son gout! And he talked of Elsie."

It was out! at last her name had passed his lips.

"She had, in fact, sent a little present yesterday. But it was not of that that I wished to speak to you, madame; forgive the digression."

Frau von Ratenow looked at him in some perplexity. Could the Bennewitzer have taken too much of the 'exquisite' wine?

"I do not know whether you can imagine yourself in my place," he continued, easily,—"I am almost afraid you cannot; but still—perhaps—women have a great advantage there; they are more sympathetic than the so-called sterner sex. I am so inexpressibly lonely, I do not see for whom I work or for whom I live; my entire house seems to gaze at me in a melancholy way; every chimney-place seems opening its mouth for a terrific yawn, as if to ask me, 'What are we here for?' This cannot go on, madame; it is injuring me physically and mentally." He paused for a moment. "I cannot get rid of Bennewitz, and so I propose once more—"

He paused. The ashes of his cigar had fallen upon his clothes; he snapped them off with his fingers.

"To marry——" the old lady eagerly completed his sentence.

"No!" he said, curtly, and leaned back in his chair.

Frau von Ratenow started and started at him. It had grown quite dark; she could only see that he was gazing past her out of the window.

" No ?"

"Assuredly not, madame. I am thinking of doing something else,—of an arrangement that will not so closely involve my individuality, and in which I need fear no repulse,—for that is painful. You know no human being is entirely without vanity, and, reason with ourselves as we may, some slight sting will remain."

The old lady sat in breathless expectation.

"I am going to try once more to connect a young life with my own, but in another way,—I am going to adopt a child."

It all flashed upon the old Frau like lightning.

"Hegebach, you will, you can—?" she exclaimed, delightedly. Then she paused. "But, good heavens! according to the will girls cannot inherit?" she said, doubtfully.

"Girls? Who said anything about a girl?" he asked.

There was no answer, only a sound of quickened breathing. Of course the man was quite right. Oh, why had Elsie conducted herself so unwarrantably? But it was bitter, bitter! Oh, the wretched child!

- "What do you say to my scheme, madame?"
- "Excellent!" she replied, with an effort, and pity

for the poor girl, who would now undoubtedly be forced to push her own way through life, almost extinguished all anger in her heart.

"Now, the next thing is to find him," said the Bennewitzer.

"You will have many applicants from whom to make your choice."

"Oh, of course!" he laughed. "Money and land will lure them forth as the rain does mush-rooms. It would be refreshing indeed to find any one to say 'no,'—eh? Well, at all events, madame, I shall submit my choice to you for your approbation, and I shall begin my search immediately. By the way, how is my cousin?"

"I—I do not know. Well, I suppose," Frau von Ratenow replied. The Bennewitzer's conduct to-day made her positively indignant.

"Good heavens, madame! you are not angry with her still? That is not right of you; indeed it is not. Do you know that I have mentally asked forgiveness of the child a thousand times for our sins against her? Yes, ours, I say, madame,—you and my cousin Hegebach and I. Our only excuse is that we meant well."

"What good did that do her?" echoed through the old Frau's soul.

"I must take my leave of you now." He arose. "And you think I am right, do you not? We all need something to cling to in our old age."

"Yes, yes, my dear Hegebach; and may you never repent it!"

When the door had closed behind him, the old lady remained standing in the middle of the room. "He has either taken a little too much wine or he is getting something of the Hegebach craze in his old age. They all have a craze, the Hegebachs. Heaven knows!——"

That same evening she wrote a letter to Elsie. Poor child! To lose everything in this way! But it was her own fault. The letter was a wonderful composition, half reproachful, half tender, and contained an entreaty that the girl would return to the castle.

The old Frau never closed her eyes that night. For the next few days she was very thoughtful and silent, and scarcely spoke at table, where the chief subject of conversation was the Bennewitzer's new scheme.

"The man is perfectly right," said Moritz. "It is quite natural that he should wish to leave his estate to some one of whom he is fond, and to whom he is bound by some legal tie, else it will revert to the state. But he might have given Elsie something for pin-money out of his private property," he added.

"Yes," Aunt Lott chimed in, "it is an ignoble revenge to take to leave her destitute; he is, after all, her cousin."

"As if Elsie would take his money!" And the speaker, Lili, curled her lip in disdain.

"Oho!" said Frau von Ratenow, who had been silent until then, "she knows well by this time what it means to depend upon her own exertions; she would take it gladly. But he would be a fool to give it to her, I think."

"No, mother, you do not think that," said Moritz, taking her hand.

CHAPTER XX.

NEW TIES.

Frau von Ratenow ordered her carriage immediately after dinner. It drove up to the hall door at that hour, greatly to her son's surprise.

"Where are you going, mother?" he asked, as the old lady in her furs and hood—the autumn day was very cold—appeared at the door, followed by her maid carrying a rug and a foot-muff.

"I am going to drive," she answered, curtly.

Moritz made no further remark,—he knew his mother too well; she had some scheme in her head. He helped her respectfully into her carriage, but he could not repress a smile. The weather was not of a kind to tempt any one to take a drive.

The carriage rolled out of the court-yard. Frau von Ratenow was busy in disposing her wraps about her. At the city gate she threw off her rug and put her head out of the window: "Drive along the road to B——, Hans, and go a little faster."

The vehicle sped along the road she had designated, the young fruit-trees on each side of it flew past. As the solitary occupant of the carriage looked from the window the autumn wind rattled at the

panes, and far in the distance the slender spire of the church at B—— appeared above a forest of oaks. Everything looked dreary and inhospitable. All was autumnal decay beneath the cloudy skies. Just this side of B—— Frau von Ratenow ordered Hans to halt.

- "Is that the Bennewitzer road?" she asked.
- "It is, madame."
- "Turn into it, Hans."

Hans turned into it, and drove on very quickly, for the rain was beginning to fall and the black clouds foretold a heavy shower. In ten minutes the carriage drew up before the imposing old gabled mansion. A servant instantly appeared, and helped the visitor to alight.

- "It is I, Lieben," she nodded to the astonished old man. "Is your master at home?"
- "He is. Will the Frau Baroness be pleased to walk in?"
- "You can rest the horses for a while, Hans," she said to her coachman, and then she entered the house. She had been quite familiar with it formerly, but now it surprised her by its air of luxury and elegance. What wonders the Bennewitzer had wrought with the old house in the course of years! The estate had become most valuable under his management.
- "Stupid girl!" she muttered to herself, as she entered a drawing-room filled with everything that

comfort and taste could suggest and that ample means could supply.

"I will tell my master," the servant whispered, pushing one of the brown satin arm-chairs in front of the fire. "He is engaged just at present."

Frau von Ratenow sat down and contemplated the large portrait above the chimney-piece. "His first wife," she said to herself. "Hegebach always had good taste," she thought further, gazing at the charming figure that seemed about to step from the frame towards her. The form was nobly proportioned, dressed in gauzy white, with the head slightly turned so that the face showed in profile; in the background the Bennewitz homestead was visible among the trees. Upon the chimney-piece, at the foot of the portrait, stood a beautiful china bowl filled with magnificent roses.

He certainly loved her very much, the old Frau thought, and then she reflected upon whether it would not be rather difficult for a successor to share her husband's attentions with a dead wife. No, he did not really want to marry.

She started up from her revery; there was a sound of loud talking in the next room, and immediately the door opened, and a lady about forty years of age entered, followed by a handsome, slender youth of fifteen. They passed Frau von Ratenow with a silent bow, and the old lady looked after them in puzzled surprise. Suddenly she

nodded her head, and murmured, "Ah, indeed!" as if she had discovered something quite important, but not exactly agreeable. In a moment she was overcome by a sense of disappointment; she seemed to herself to have come hither upon a bootless errand; any suggestion of hers would be quite superfluous.

Then the Bennewitzer appeared, and respectfully kissed her hand.

- "My dear Frau von Ratenow, to what do I owe the rare pleasure of this visit?"
- "I do not wonder that you ask, Hegebach. It is indeed strange, is it not, that I should burst in upon you thus?"
 - "It is delightful, madame."

He begged her to sit down again, and took a chair opposite her.

- "I will not detain you long, Hegebach. I am afraid I disturbed you in—in—business of importance."
- "Not at all; there is no hurry about the affair," he replied.
 - "The boy is very handsome, Hegebach."
- "The one who just passed through the room?" he asked. "Ah, a splendid fellow!"
- "He is, indeed," she assented. Then there was a pause. The Bennewitzer walked to the bell.
- "I am very glad, dear madame," he began, when he returned to his seat, "that you have come. I

should else, possibly, have driven over to see you. I am restless and agitated,—you know on what account. It is a step that cannot be lightly taken. Suddenly to bring a stranger into one's home,—to expect from him all that which only the ties of blood usually justify one in demanding,—to bind one's self to give and to be to this stranger all that one has been to one's own children,—it is something most strange, madame, and, I can assure you, far from easy."

The old lady nodded. Her thoughts were still busy with the handsome boy who had passed through the room. She could not endure the uncertainty any longer. "Excuse me, Hegebach," she began, with a deep-drawn breath, "but was not that handsome fellow a candidate for the position of your adopted son?"

- " Who?"
- "The one who, with his mother, passed-"
- "Oh, no, no, madame! I am, indeed, his guardian, and take a lively interest in him,—he was my poor Heinrich's best friend; but——"
- "Forgive me, Hegebach." Frau von Ratenow breathed freely.
- "But I have other arrangements in view, and am hourly expecting tidings."

Again the old lady was disconcerted. "Well, my dear Hegebach, I wish you all success!" She rose hastily,—it was growing dark. "I must

hurry home,—they do not know where I am. And there is no need to stay here any longer—— Pardon me, Hegebach, I came to suggest to you—I—I had a plan, but it is too late. Do not take it amiss, Hegebach."

He did not reply; in the quiet room all that was heard was the rustle of her heavy silk gown as she buttoned her mantle, and the low tick of the clock.

"Adieu, Hegebach. You know old women always like to thrust their noses in other people's affairs, but I meant well."

He followed her silently to the door. "Why are you in such a hurry?" he asked, at last, eagerly. "Will you not take some refreshment?"

She thanked him, but declined, and she had her hand on the latch of the door, when she retreated a step; the old servant entered, carrying a lamp, and handed his master a despatch.

"One moment, dear madame," the Bennewitzer begged earnestly, and, going to the light, he opened the envelope. "Read it," he then said, handing it to her. "I am again unfortunate."

She put up her eye-glass and read:

"Refuses. Have plead in vain.

"von Rost."

- "What does this mean?" she asked, quickly.
- "A refusal from the son of my choice." He had changed colour.

Frau von Ratenow stared at the despatch; the room grew dim before her eyes; she read the date, and the name of the place whence the despatch had been sent, then the signature. A tempest of delight stirred in her heart.

- "And you have set your heart on this one?"
- "On this one, this very one,—my whole heart," he said.
- "Empower me, Hegebach. You do not know him well. Let me--"
- "I hardly know him at all," he interposed. "One thing alone decided me to choose him, the——"
- "Hegebach!" The old Frau went up to him as he stood by the table with one hand leaning lightly upon it, as if reflecting profoundly. "Hegebach!" She tried to go on, but suddenly began to cry. It was for pure joy, but she was vexed that the tears would well forth so irrepressibly; nothing irritated her more than to be found out so overcome by the melting mood. She resolutely dried her eyes, and began to scold: "And I was going to give you the slip, Hegebach. Upon my word, you are a sly one. But you find yourself at a standstill. Ah, 'tis always so when two of the so-called sterner sex put their heads together to do something particularly wise. Rost! What arguments could he have brought forward? Could you not have found a better ambassador? And why was I

to know nothing of all this? Come, confess, if you please, Hegebach."

He smiled. "We wanted to surprise you, madame; you never would have thought of this one."

"Indeed?" she asked, laughing in the midst of her tears. "Nevertheless, old Frau Ratenow must be called in to aid in the matter."

And this was quite true. Late that evening, Moritz shook his head upon learning that his mother was going to start upon a journey the next day. She did so, however, returning three days afterwards. Then the Bennewitzer came, and they started off together. This time they made no secret of their destination,—they were going to Berlin.

"Is mamma bent on providing the Bennewitzer with a son, since there was no helping him to a wife?" asked Frieda. "But there's one thing I cannot understand, Moritz."

"And that is?"

"Why, I understood mamma's efforts to marry him,—they were all on Elsie's account. But I cannot see why she is so interested in his adopting a son; that puzzles me. It is no affair of hers, is it, Moritz?"

Moritz was so disagreeable as to make no reply. He only whistled softly to himself.

That evening the newly-married von Rosts paid a visit at the castle. It rained and stormed, and Frieda's blue boudoir was most luxurious.

They had returned very soon from their weddingtrip. Annie had been everywhere before, and the weather was extremely bad. Besides, Rost had arranged so strange a programme. Instead of going to Vienna, he had taken his bride to the obscure town of H---, and there he had disappeared for an entire half-day,-"to buy a horse," he afterwards informed Annie. For a cavalry officer nothing, not even his honey-moon, could interfere with a transaction of this nature. And then-Annie told of it half laughing, half vexed—the monster had put the climax upon his conduct by taking her to Berlin,—"to Berlin, which I know as well as I do my native place. But there my patience gave out. And we saw Frau von Ratenow there, too," she added.

"Yes, mamma is there upon some secret mission." And Frieda shook her head.

"The Bennewitzer was in Berlin, too," said Annie.

"And Bernardi sends his regards to you all," the bridegroom added, sticking his eye-glass in his eye to observe Frieda.

"From Berlin?" she exclaimed, in unfeigned surprise.

Moritz laughed gently, and then took his leave of his guests,—he was going to the railway-station for his mother.

"Well, my boy," she said, as, an hour afterwards,

she sat beside her son in the carriage, rolling swiftly through the dark, wintry night to the castle, "now it is all right. But there was no end of trouble in every way. Why, Moritz, Hegebach was forced to see the Emperor himself! Certainly men have shown wonderful ingenuity in devising laws to make life as difficult as possible. In a couple of weeks, Moritz, the Bennewitzer will have a son,—and such a son!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"ONLY A PENNILESS GIRL."

WINTER had come.

The little Moravian village lay lonely under the leafless trees; through their bare boughs the distant mountains could plainly be discerned, their summits already glistening with snow. In the Institute the Thuringian beech logs were crackling in the stoves, and the lamps were lighted early in the afternoon.

Elsie von Hegebach was coming out of the schoolroom, and about thirty little girls came running
round and past her out into the new-fallen snow,
where they shouted with glee and instantly began
pelting one another with snow-balls. The young
girl stood for a while on the threshold of the open
door, looking on at the flying missiles and listening to the children's cries of joy. A smile flitted
across her pale face; she had once been like one
of these. She inhaled deep draughts of the invigorating snowy air; it was delicious after the close
school-room.

At last she walked directly across the garden to one of the wings of the building, mounted the

creaking stairs, and in a moment was alone in her room. The dearest hours of her day had come. She could either read, or write letters, or sit at the window and gaze far out over the landscape and think-well, of what does one think when one is alone, and near at hand a violin is singing sweet old melodies? Miss Brown, the English teacher, always extemporized for an hour on the violin at this time of the afternoon. Sometimes Elsie could not listen; those were the days when heartache and longing overwhelmed her and it seemed impossible that she should go on for ever and ever leading this weary life. Then her poor head burned and throbbed, her heart ached, and so did her eyes with weeping. And she could not help asking herself, why-why should she have no happiness,-none at all?

Then she would fly from the tones of the violin, and would walk quickly out in the wind and storm, she cared not whither, or she would take refuge with Sister Beata and sit with her mute and motionless.

"I cannot listen to the violin, Sister Beata."

"But, Elizabeth, let me give thee another room."

"No, no, not that! Not that!"

To-day she stood, as if lost in thought, before her simple chest of drawers; the upper drawer she had opened, taking from it several papers, which she carried to the window, where she sat down to read over and over again the letters she had received about two months before, which had given her so much food for thought.

- "Dear Elsie,—You know that it was not on my own account that I was angry with you, but solely because you chose to manage your own affairs, and to manage them very badly. Well, that is done, and cannot be undone. You must bear the consequences of your conduct, and God will, I trust, guide your future paths aright,—although I am not pious enough to believe that our whole course in life is laid out like an architect's plan by the hand of the Almighty while we are still in swaddling-clothes.
 - "Such a belief is fit only for Turks.
- "I think God has given us our reason that we may judge for ourselves and act accordingly. You abused yours, refused to listen to it, and followed the dictates of your silly heart. The consequences are worse than I thought; but enough of this for the present,—you will learn it all soon enough, and there is repentance in store for you.
- "But now, I pray you, Elsie, come back to us. You must not lose the home of your childhood. Resign your place in the Institute. You are wanted here, and the bread that you eat will not be that of strangers, which proverbially has seven crusts.
 - "I trust you will come soon. The winter even-

ings are long, and I want you to read aloud to me, as you did last year. God bless you!

"Your ever-faithful and well-meaning
"AUNT RATENOW."

She shook her head. "No," she said, half aloud, as she laid the letter aside, "I am no pet lap-dog, ready to leap over the stick held out for him. No!"

She sat quietly for a while, and then took up the second sheet, written over in Lili's scrawling hand. She looked through the account of Annie Cramm's wedding, and her eyes rested upon the concluding sentences of the letter: "And a telegraph came too from Bernardi. Indeed, Elsie,-hear and be surprised,-the freshly-made bridegroom seems actually to have sworn brotherhood with the Bennewitzer. He suddenly left his beloved spouse in the lurch and went over and sat down by him, directly opposite me. They talked together most intimately, and very impolitely in an undertone. I could not get even a glance from the Bennewitzer. they drank each other's healths and separated. The Bennewitzer vanished immediately after dinner, and, as I afterwards heard, sat for a while with Aunt Ratenow. Yes, and now, Elsie, comes what I really want to tell you,-I have given up all hope, for the Bennewitzer is going 'to retire.' Do you know what that means in his case? He has already been negotiating in a furniture warehouse

for a grandfather's chair. He has given up all idea of marrying. He is going to adopt a son!

"Your aunt says he is quite right; but in reality she is raging,—I can see it,—for, my dear, she had determined that you should live at Bennewitz. As for leaving you in D——, and not forgiving you,—oh, all that was only an extreme measure to starve you into submission. Thus affairs stand at present.

"Ah, dearest Elsie, I am afraid we shall both die old maids, and I have not the least talent for it like Aunt Lott. Now, she is a born old maid."

And was this the truth, then? Aunt Ratenow had meant thus to bring her to terms, and now the Bennewitzer himself, thank Heaven! had drawn his pen through the account. No, no, Aunt Ratenow had always meant well by her, but she could not go back to the castle. She never could go back. She thought of all the wakeful nights, of all the hours of anguish, that she had spent there, and then she remembered—— "No!" She unfolded a third sheet, a copy of the letter she had written in reply to Aunt Ratenow:

"MY DEAR AUNT,—Many, many thanks for your kind words, which have soothed and gratified me inexpressibly. It was a heavy burden for me to bear, that of your displeasure, and my only consolation in the melancholy days after your departure

from here lay in the consciousness that I had done right. I thank you from my heart for the love which you have always shown for me, and which you now bestow upon me again. How can I ever forget what you have done for me? Do not think me stubborn and ungrateful, but I must stay here. I know that in constant work I shall find the only remedy for all the suffering through which I have passed during this last year—"

She dropped the paper in her lap. Had she not written too bitterly? she asked herself; but then who can hope for sweet fruit from a blighted, stunted tree? She had written thus involuntarily.

She put away her letters, and sat quietly at the window. In the next room a note sounded from the violin. Miss Brown seemed inclined to melancholy; she began with 'Home, Sweet Home.'

Miss Brown was a tall, sandy-haired girl with freckles, and in her eyes there was an expression of perpetual homesickness. Her happiest hours were those when she played the violin in the twilight, she had told Elsie; and Elsie now closed her eyes and dreamed of another hand whose bow caressed the strings so magically, luring from them tones infinitely sweeter and softer than these.

How vivid it all grew! That was the Hungarian dance; and now—how came the English girl to know that German folk-song?—

"Ah, who in this wide world like me is alone?

No father, no mother, no money my own.

I've nothing, no, nothing——"

The tears rushed to her eyes. Where did they come from, all these tears?

Some one came stamping up the stairs outside her room. Who could it be making such a noise? The lamp was probably not yet lighted on the landing. A heavy step passed her door; it was a man's tread. There was a knock at the door of the room next to hers, and the violin was hushed. "Come in," she heard Miss Brown call, and then came, "Dear me!" and the tones of a man's voice begging to be excused and asking to be directed.

"It is the next door, sir," Miss Brown said, in her foreign German.

Elsie suddenly stood on the threshold of her open door, trying to peer into the darkness, her hands clasped over her beating heart.

"Moritz?" she asked, in a low, hesitating voice.

"Elsie, my dear little girl, where are you hiding? In this Egyptian darkness it is impossible to see my hand before my face. Yes, my girl, you are surprised now, eh?"

It was Moritz's familiar voice. They stood together in Elsie's little room, the girl still utterly bewildered. "You, Moritz?" With trembling fingers she lighted the lamp and gazed into his face.

"Yes, I." And he took off his plaid, upon

which the snow-flakes had begun to melt, and held out both hands to her. "And what do I want, hey? I have come for you, you runaway. I dare not show myself at the castle again without you."

She shook her head, and looked at him steadily with eyes that told of tears. He smiled, and seated himself comfortably in a chair near the fire.

- "Only for a visit of a few days, Elsie; my mother must speak with you. She cannot travel, or she would have come herself; she is not exactly what she was. She was very ill in the spring, and so they sent me."
 - "Aunt wrote to me some time ago," said Elsie.
- "And you answered her letter. I know it."
 Elsie blushed. "I could not do otherwise, Moritz."
- "My mother does not ask anything of you, Elsie, except to come with me. You are free to come back here again whenever you choose."
 - "I do not know, Moritz, how it will do-"
- "It will do, Elsie. Dress yourself warmly, and come."
- "What do you mean, Moritz? Without saying anything-"
- "Eh? Oh, I have been having an hour's talk with Sister Beata; it is all arranged."
 - "I do not want to go," she said, stubbornly.
- "Of course not," he replied, "or you would not be a Hegebach. Obstinacy is in your blood."

"Moritz," and the tears filled her eyes again, "I have never brought anything but care and sorrow to any human being since I came into the world. I have not meant it, but so it is,—my father, your mother, and you. Yes, Moritz, you too, and you were always so kind. Leave me here! Ah, leave me here!"

He burst into a laugh so loud and hearty that the violin next door stopped, as if startled, in the midst of a brilliant run. "You dear, foolish little girl!" he said, putting his arm around her, "do you know that too? Well, for your comfort, let me tell you it was Frieda's plan that I should come and get you. Aunt Lott wanted to come, but Frieda insisted that I should be the one. Are you satisfied now? Oh, cry away,—you have a quarter of an hour for it,—and meanwhile I will try your boasted vin du pays in the inn here. I shall come for you in a quarter of an hour, Elsie. Now please light me down-stairs,—this ladder is desperately dangerous in the dark. Au revoir! Be ready!"

She sat down obstinately. She would not go. Who could force her? What right had they to drag her forth from the peace of mind she had won at such cost? And thus she sat when Moritz reappeared.

His honest blue eyes looked at her in pained surprise, and then he took his watch in his hand and planted himself before the fire. "Ten minutes still," his lips said, but his eyes said, "I did not think this of you, Elsie."

She arose, took her cloak from the closet, and hurriedly packed a travelling-bag. Then she paused, and again "I cannot" hovered upon her lips. And then she found herself in the hall of the main building, ready to go, and Sister Beata held her hand.

- "God bless thee, Elizabeth!" the Sister said.
- "I shall soon be back."
- "If God please!" said the gentle little woman.

It was snowing outside; the feathery flakes were falling leisurely, and the delicious snowy air cooled Elsie's burning cheeks.

"Are you warmly enough clad, my girl?" Moritz asked, anxiously. She nodded, and walked beside him in silence.

They were just in time. Elsie hardly knew how she was so quickly seated in the bright, warm railway-carriage.

"This is the express," said Moritz, as they left the station. "It goes in five hours. We shall be at home at eleven."

At home! Elsie turned away and looked out of the window into the darkness. She had a depressing sensation of hypocritical submission and weakness of character which made her quite wretched. Moritz noticed that she was distressed, and he tried to divert her mind.

"I know of no news to tell you, Elsie," he began.

"The Rosts entertain a good deal. Frau Annie excels in that line and in gorgeous toilettes. And Lili is on the verge of betrothal, as she writes to my wife. It is an old love-affair, I believe. My father-in-law has hitherto opposed it strenuously. It was, I think,—but I suppose you know all about it,—a boy and girl attachment. He has a very good position in Heidelberg now, and the child has persevered and gained her point, in spite of all her apparent frivolity."

Elsie looked up, but she said nothing. She felt even more melancholy.

- "Yes, and the Bennewitzer has carried out his intention. May I smoke a little, Elsie? Thank you very much. And he has at last an adopted son. Is it too warm for you, Elsie?"
 - "Yes; please open the window."
- "My mother had to have her say in the matter," he went on, opening the window and puffing the smoke of his cigar contentedly into the open air. "He could hardly have succeeded as he did without her help. He seems very well content now."
- "I am very glad," she said, answering for the first time his efforts to entertain her.
- "He is shortly to celebrate the great event with suitable magnificence. You may imagine that it is the theme of town gossip."

Yes, indeed! And so would she be also. Oh, she had been foolish and weak to come with Moritz!

She wrapped her cloak about her, drew down her veil, and leaned her head back against the cushion. She was out of humour with herself.

And the train sped through the night, and Moritz slept. The nearer they reached their destination the more uneasy she became, inexplicably uneasy. Then it all began to seem like a dream, sitting in the carriage that waited for them at the station,—like an old, sad, and yet sweet dream. The coachman's 'good-evening' sounded gayly in her ears, and the coupé smelled sweet of the particular perfume that was Frieda's favourite. Happy old memories througed thick and fast in her mind. Her very heart was warmed by them: she could not help it.

She stood half bewildered in the spacious hall, and Moritz excused Frieda for not being up to receive her,—she was doubtless asleep,—and so was his mother, but Aunt Lott was waiting for her up-stairs, would she not go directly up?

And she once more passed up the broad, thickly-carpeted staircase, and at Aunt Lott's door stood a little figure with wide-open arms. "Ah, thank God, Elsie, my darling, here you are!" fell on her ear, and the little old lady clasped her close with tears of joy in her dear eyes. "Now that you are come, all will be well."

How she talked, dear Aunt Lott, and persuaded her to take a cup of tea, while the girl sat silent, and only asked at last, "Is there not an odour of violets here?"

"You only imagine it, Elsie, my dear; memory conjures up the fragrance. Yes, yes, I understand all that."

Then the old lady insisted upon the girl's going to bed immediately; she must sleep, she must be fresh the next day, she looked so pale. And then Elsie lay in bed and looked around the room dimly lighted by the gleaming snow outside. The dying fire glimmered in the tiled stove, and was reflected in the parquetted floor; there stood the bureau, and there was her dolls' closet. How unutterably dear and familiar it all was! Against her will she felt so at home, so taken care of. And then dream and reality began each to strive for the mastery, and she fell asleep.

It was bright daylight when she waked, the sun was shining golden into the pleasant room, and—yes, it certainly smelled of violets.

She rubbed her eyes; she could hardly collect her thoughts; then she started up in bed. Frau von Ratenow was sitting on the edge of the bed, with a huge bunch of violets in her hand.

- "Good-morning to you, you lazy Elsie!"
- "Oh, aunt, forgive me!" Elsie stammered.
- "I am glad you are come, my girl. Give me your hand; let us have no more obstinacy or anger, eh? You must surely know that your old aunt never

meant you any harm. And now she begs you to forgive her for tormenting and paining you. Do you know what it is for an old woman like myself to say to a scrap of a girl, 'Ah, don't be angry any more'?" As she spoke, she drew the girl tenderly towards her and stroked her face; as she did so, the bunch of violets fell upon the coverlet.

"They are from the Bennewitzer," she said. Elsie turned pale.

"Yes, they are, indeed, Elsie; and I have a message for you, too. But dress yourself as quickly as you can, and I will wait for you in Lott's room with her."

The girl arose, and performed her toilette with her heart beating anxiously. No, it could not be that they were meditating a fresh attack upon her. Moritz had told her that the Bennewitzer had an adopted son; he only wanted to be friends with her again.

At last she entered Aunt Lott's pretty sittingroom. "See what a glorious winter's day it is," the old lady said, pointing out of the window.

"Just the day for a sleigh-ride," Frau von Ratenow declared. "What would you say to a sleighing-party, Elsie? But come now! Lott, are you ready? We are all going to breakfast together today, Elsie, with Moritz."

And she took the young girl's arm and walked with her along the corridor.

"There, I cannot help it, Elsie, I must tell you," she said, as they went on. "The Bennewitzer sends you his love,—the old one, you understand, the young man would not yet venture to do so,—and tells you that he promised your father on his deathbed to take care of you, to protect and guard you, and that he must keep his word. And since you would have none of him as a lover, he hopes you will find it more to your taste to be his daughterin-law. But, child, what are you about? What is the matter? Hold her tight, Aunt Lott!"

But this was not necessary. Elsie suddenly leaned half unconscious against the shoulder of the old Frau, who was opening the door into Frieda's hall.

"Elsie! Elsie! She always has so much courage, it must not fail her now. Yes, yes, the Bennewitzer's adopted son plays the violin; he is a fine, talented fellow!"

Elsie suddenly found herself alone in the luxurious room. She grasped the tall back of an armchair and listened,—listened with failing senses. All that her aunt had said, the tones that now echoed in the air about her, seemed to whisper of happiness so great that it was beyond belief. No, it could not be!

The music stopped short, there was a sound of hasty steps behind her, and then a voice spoke: "Elsie, what is happiness, if it is not this hour?"

All was quiet in the next room. Aunt Ratenow went to the portière, drew it slightly aside for a moment, and looked through the opening. Then she turned away to the Bennewitzer, gravely nodded her head, gave him her hand, and they both stood looking out into the garden.

Tick! tick! went the little clock; nothing else was heard: not a word from the other room; once only there was a low sob.

- "Come, come, show yourselves, children!" Moritz called at last. This silence lasted quite too long for him. Then they appeared, and a girl, glowing with a new-found bliss, clasped her arms about the Bennewitzer's neck.
- "Cousin," she sobbed, "you have forgiven me. Ah, you are too kind—much too kind to me!"
- "I have nothing to forgive, my child," he said, gently.
 - "How shall I thank you, cousin?"
- "By coming soon to Bennewitz, Elsie. It is so lonely there."
- "She would not have me; indeed, she did not want me. Confess it, Elsie." And Bernardi drew her towards him from the Bennewitzer's arms. "She said she was only a penniless girl!"

THE END.

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